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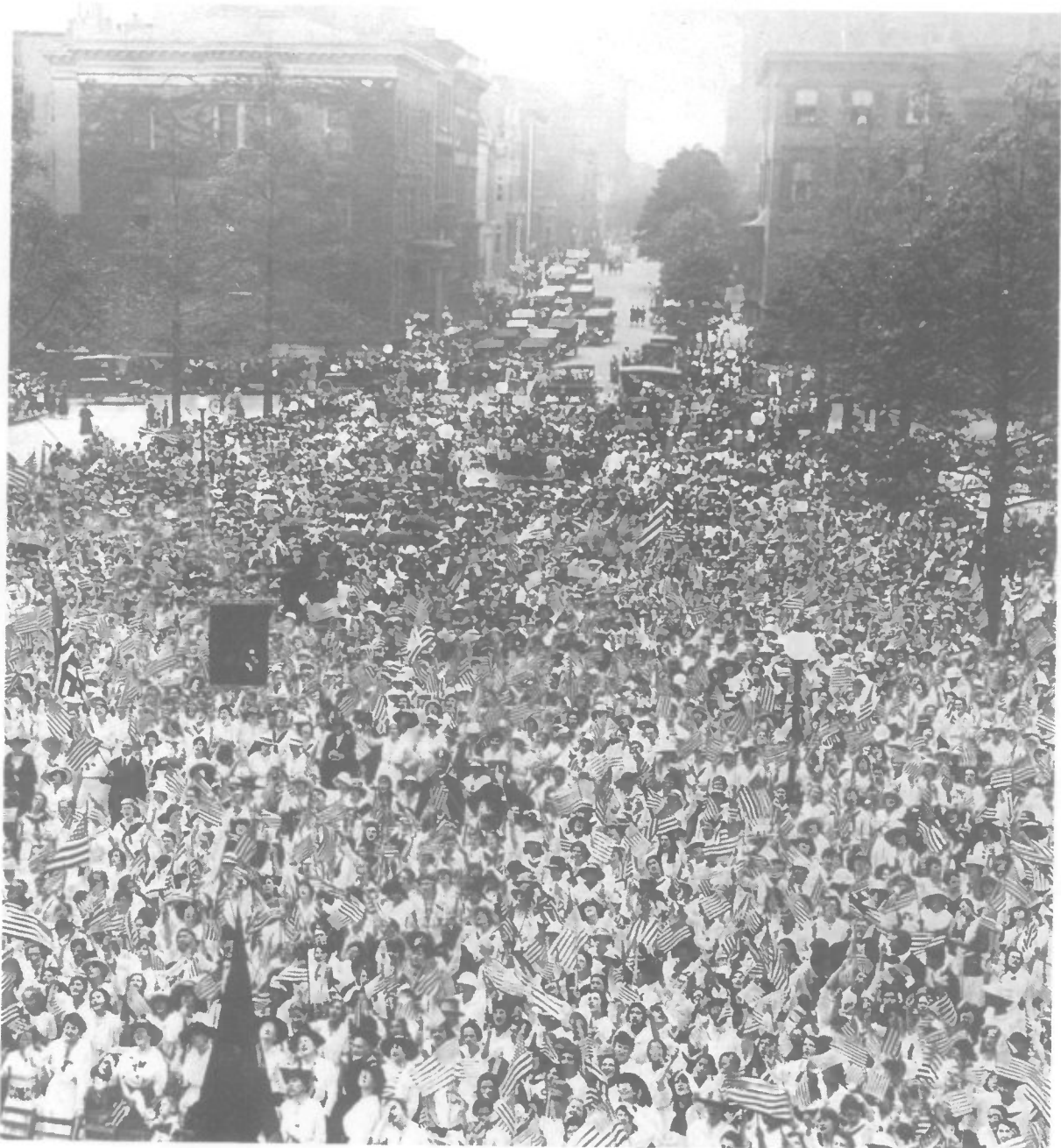
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MARYLAND

# *Historical Magazine*



THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Founded 1844*

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# MARYLAND

## *Historical Magazine*

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## Editor's Notebook

### *The Greatest Generation*

Like most historians, as a rule I distrust memoirs. A few throughout American history have been invaluable—*The Education of Henry Adams* comes swiftly to mind, as do the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, who ground few axes in constructing perhaps the best remembered record of the Civil War. But for the most part memoirists and autobiographers cannot help touching up the past with regard to their own role in it. Embellishment and exculpation are common characteristics.

Imagine my joy then, at a cocktail party last New Year's Eve, amidst the happy hats and streamers decorating one of Baltimore's fine old houses, when the hostess approached me as we were leaving and presented a small request. She had an elderly friend who was writing his autobiography for his family but—and here came the catch—"since you're a publisher would you mind taking a look at it?" Naturally, I asked why I should, if it was for his family. Well, came the reply, he has a nice way with words. I smiled. Not at all, I lied. Two months later, well into the new year and after repeated nudgings from the hostess, I found time and energy one night to leaf through the manuscript, the portion recounting the subject's service in World War II, in northern France with the 29th Division.

As all are doubtless aware, the "greatest generation" has generated considerable attention in recent years, propelled by major literary, cinematic, and celebrity forces—Stephen Ambrose, Steven Spielberg, Tom Brokaw—and has demonstrated great commercial ability. The image settled upon by consensus is that of a generation that staunchly faced the Depression, went into battle to save the world from tyranny, then used American gumption and ingenuity to build the most powerful nation on earth (preserving and expanding the free world in the process), all the while looking great in uniform and dancing to terrific music.

Enter the memoir of a friend of a friend. His name is Emil Willimetz, and he was born in the Bronx in 1918 to parents who had emigrated from Austria five years earlier. He grew up to consider himself an outsider in almost everything, and so he learned to observe as an outsider. In 1943 he was drafted—he did not enlist in a fever to save the world—and a little more than a year later arrived in Normandy on the heels of the invasion. He was sent to the 29th Division, which had sustained heavy casualties on Omaha Beach a month earlier, and hence his importance to this journal. Emil Willimetz, the outsider, the self-styled "gringo," saw things a little differently, realizing that only by chance was he in American olive drab and not on the other side of the hedgerow, in German field grey. For fifty years he kept his thoughts largely to himself before deciding to write everything down for his grandchildren. To his enormous credit, he has

attempted to put himself back in the same boots he wore in June 1944, and to remember things as he saw them then.

This is a memoir for those who have not been in war. It shields the worst from innocent eyes but spares little else, not even the author's own ego. American military idols—Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton all take their lumps, as do the infantryman's usual suspects: quartermasters, the rear echelon, allied strategists, and the air force. "We would be very happy to swap weapons with the krauts," a sergeant remarks, noting the vast superiority of German weaponry. Bill Mauldin, whose cartoon characters Willy and Joe attained immortality at the front, would have recognized Willmetz slogging along in his awkwardly oversized greatcoat. Ernie Pyle, friend to many a cold, hungry, soaked, and filthy dogface, would have known him, too.

In the fall 1999 issue of the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, we published a sanitized account of Maryland troops in World War I. In this issue we present a tempered but not whitewashed account of World War II as Maryland and Virginia infantrymen saw it. We do so lest those who come later think that "greatness" was an inevitability because our side won the war. We also present it as a corrective to the myth-making now in progress. Only a fraction of those men and women who served in the armed forces during World War II were involved in combat, perhaps 7 percent. Their pain, suffering, and achievements have led those who were not there to call them "greatest," but they would be the first to tell you: Be careful when you use the word. As historians we say amen, and offer our deepest gratitude.

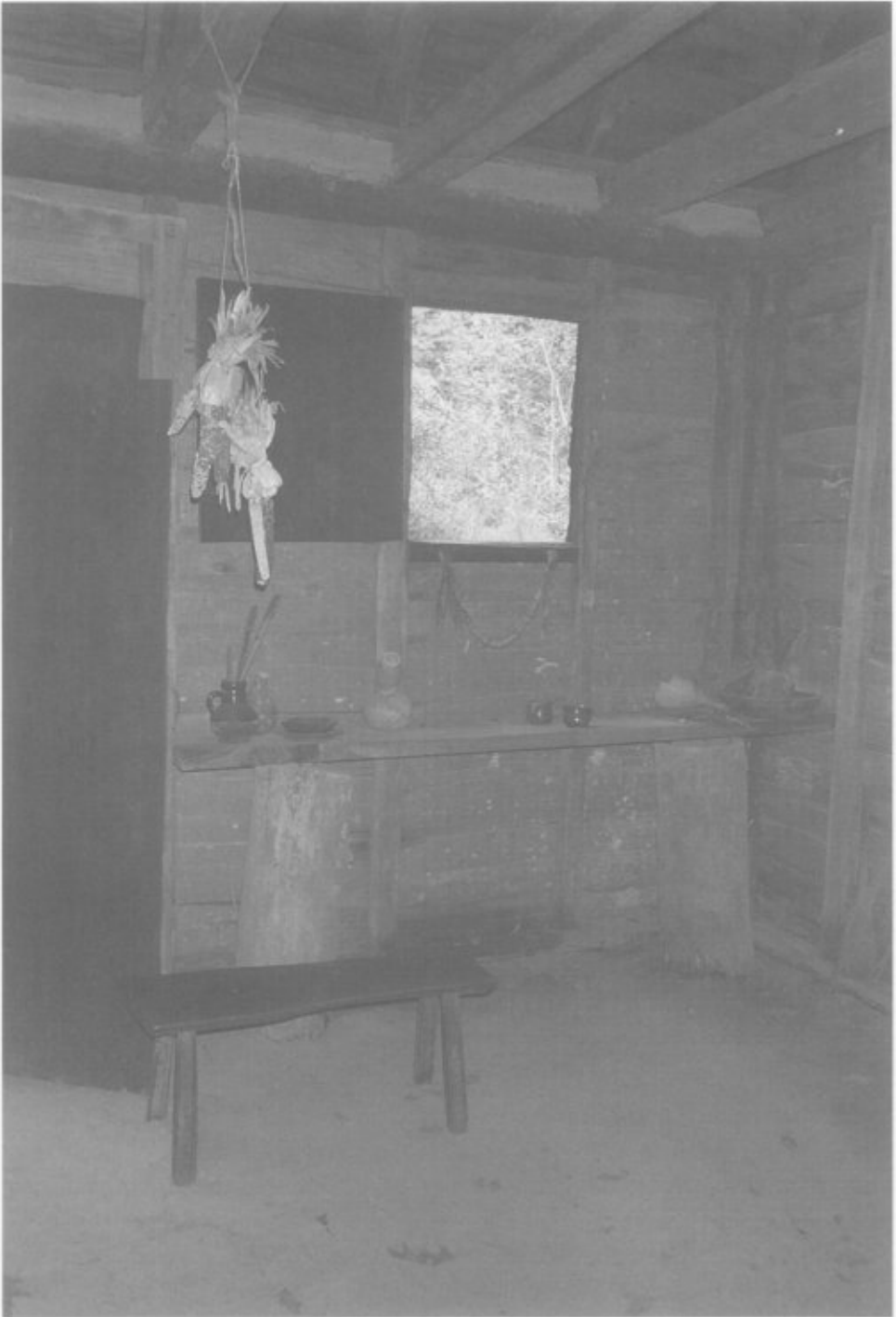
R.I.C.

## Cover

### *Mount Vernon, July 1917*

James Hughes operated a commercial photography studio in Baltimore from 1877, when his name first appeared in the Baltimore City Directory as a photographer, to his death in 1903. Hughes Company employee James W. Scott then bought the company from Hughes' widow and later passed the thriving business to his son Gaither Scott. The company existed until Scott's retirement in 1970. This Hughes Company photograph is one of over 36,000 vintage images documenting life in Baltimore City and the surrounding counties. The Hughes Company collection is now in the care of the Maryland Historical Society.

P.D.A.



*Reconstructed interior of a poor planter's house. Despite the promise of economic equality in the new nation, many colonial Marylanders never owned land. Some earned a meager living as tenant farmers or migrant workers. (Historic St. Mary's City.)*

# “Objects of Distress”: Inequality and Poverty in Early Nineteenth-Century Prince George’s County

STEVEN SARSON

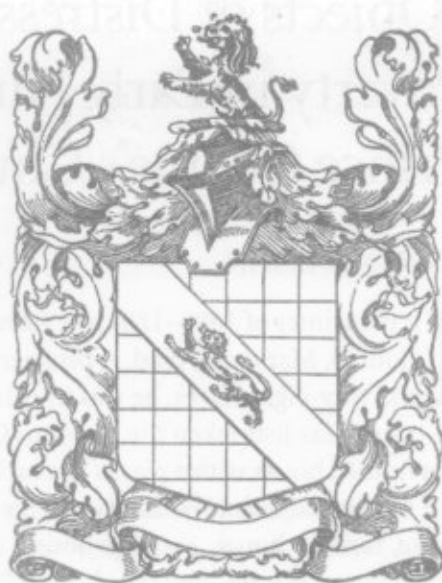
In the winter of 1800–1801, the Reverend Clement Brooke of Prince George’s County, Maryland, died. A prosperous planter, owner of 1,045 acres of land and fifty-eight slaves, he was the nineteenth wealthiest head of household in the county tax lists taken the previous October.<sup>1</sup> He had lived in a fifty-by-thirty foot framed house with a piazza “on each side” and with a twenty-four-by-sixteen foot kitchen adjacent. Within two acres of the big house were a meat house, milk house, lumber house, carriage house, and two slave cabins. Farther away were nine tobacco houses, two cow houses “with eight foot sheds,” five more “small” slave cabins, and two tenant houses. The value of the land and buildings was \$10,435.25, according to the Federal Direct Tax of 1798, although its market value would have been a little higher.<sup>2</sup>

An inventory taken in January 1801, following the preacher’s death, estimated the worth of his personal estate at \$14,405.54, probably very close to its market price. Most valuable were fifty-eight slaves, worth \$9,346. Other saleable or working capital, worth \$4,346.97, comprised forty thousand pounds of crop tobacco, 260 barrels of maize, twenty thousand pounds of timothy hay, “A Quantity of Corn fodder,” “5 pounds Cotton in Seed,” ten horses, forty-seven sheep, seventy-two swine, six bee hives, “3 old Cyder Mills press and trough,” “3 handMills,” a millstone, “Shoe Makers tools,” “Carpenters & Cooper tools,” various casks, and sundry items such as wagons, saddles, branding irons, guns, hunting nets, hoes, and so on, all testifying to a variety of supplements to tobacco staple agriculture. The remaining \$712.57 in personalty consisted of household items, many of them luxurious. Clothes and a library were respectively worth \$100 and \$200, fifty-six items of gold and silver (including dinnerware, jewelry, and sartorial adjuncts such as cuff-links) were worth \$109.75, and the rest comprised scores of other items of comfort such as mahogany, cherry, and walnut furniture, “6 feather Beds,” and “13 Rose Blankets.”<sup>3</sup>

Charles Jones died a year after Clement Brooke, but his sparse estate provides a stark contrast with that of the planter-preacher. He owned no land or slaves, just “one Old horse,” “one Cow and Calf,” “one Sow,” two feather beds and bedsteads, two tables, “4 Old Chears,” and “1 Old Chest,” altogether worth \$60.50.<sup>4</sup> Priscilla

*The author teaches history at the University of Wales, Swansea.*

*Brooke family coat-of-arms. Reverend Clement Brooke (1730–1800) descended from one of Maryland's wealthy founding families. On his death, the appraisers valued his estate at \$14,405.54. (George Norbury MacKenzie, Colonial Families of the United States [New York: The Grafton Press, 1907].)*



Howington, who died and whose property was inventoried two months after Jones's, was even poorer. She owned "one Old horse. . . . One Cow and Calf. . . . three piges," twenty-one ounces of "Old Pewter. . . . one Old Table. . . . One Old Cupbord. . . . two Old Beds and Bedsteades. . . . two old pots and [an] oven. . . . Old Lumber," and "Nine pounds of old iron and Skillet," worth \$42.54.<sup>5</sup>

The kinds of inequalities represented in the respective properties of Clement Brooke, Charles Jones, and Priscilla Howington are perhaps not surprising, given what colonial Chesapeake historians have found about rising socioeconomic differentiation and the growth of a propertyless sector of the free population in the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> And yet they are surprising in light of what early national historians generally say about rural society in the early republic. While colonial historians have relied on sources such as wills, inventories, and tax records for their socioeconomic analyses, usually of particular localities in depth, the currently dominant "republican synthesis" school of early national historical thought is influenced by the philosophical-epistemological premise that social realities are intellectually or linguistically constructed. The methodological corollary is that these historians rely heavily on literary sources, especially the writings of contemporary agrarians, for their socioeconomic analyses, usually abstract ones of society in general. Consequently, like those agrarians, they tend to see society in the early republic as roughly egalitarian, at least in as much as the large majority owned land and thus possessed economic independence and self-sufficiency.<sup>7</sup>

This article challenges the "republican synthesis" conception of early national rural society, at least for the Chesapeake tobacco-slave-plantation region, em-



playing the same sorts of methods and sources used by colonialists. It explores inequality, focusing on the existence of poverty in the free population, using Prince George's County on Maryland's lower western shore as a test case. Studying a single county risks producing unrepresentative results, although the findings here make sense in the light of colonial Chesapeake historical development and are similar to the few early national studies of tobacco society which have used the same kinds of sources but which have not received the attention they deserve.<sup>8</sup> The benefits of the local approach lie in the opportunity for closer analysis of the socioeconomic conditions of individuals and groups than is afforded by the more impressionistic generalizations of contemporary writers. Indeed, a local analysis based on county property records shows that agrarian writers were selective to the point of distortion, for it reveals the existence of a large and growing section of the population which was materially poor and was excluded from agrarian discourses. These poorer people were able to make a living as tenants and wage laborers as long as times were generally good.<sup>9</sup> But their economic position was precarious, and when faced with economic crisis, as they were in the late 1810s, many found themselves dependent upon county alms, being, in the levy court's words, "such objects of distress as to require immediate relief."<sup>10</sup>

Table 1 allows us to place Clement Brooke, Charles Jones, and Priscilla Howington in the context of the whole Prince George's population. Clement Brooke was toward the top of the richest decile—nineteenth from the top in 1800—with total taxable wealth of \$8,695.50, according to annual county assessments which rated property at much less than market value. Members of this group, which owned over two-thirds of taxable property, were almost four times richer on average than those in the second decile and almost sixty times richer than the poorest taxpayers. Charles Jones and Priscilla Howington, however, were among 782 Prince

Table 1: *Distribution of Total Wealth among Percentile Groups of Resident Household Heads, 1800*

%/no. of householders		Value	% of value	Cum. %	Mean value
10	171	819,236.82	67.5	67.5	4,790.86
10	171	209,247.45	17.2	84.7	1,223.67
10	172	101,605.03	8.4	93.1	590.73
10	171	52,219.43	4.3	97.4	305.38
10	171	26,221.91	2.2	99.5	153.34
4.3	74	5,939.84	0.5	100	80.27
45.7	782	0	0	100	0
Total	1,712	1,214,460.48	100	100	709.38

Table 2: *Distribution of Total Wealth, 1810*

%/no. of householders		Value	% of value	Cum. %	Mean value
10	162	1,151,024.19	70.3	70.3	7,105.09
10	162	269,933.02	16.5	86.7	1,666.25
10	162	124,741.07	7.6	94.3	770.01
10	162	57,969.06	3.5	97.9	357.83
10	162	25,296.01	1.5	99.4	156.15
9.3	150	9,923.35	0.6	100	66.16
40.7	660	0	0	100	0
Total	1,620	1,638,886.69	100	100	1,011.66

Georgians, nearly 46 percent of county household heads, who owned less than £40, or \$106.80, in total and were thus exempt from local taxes. Poverty such as theirs, then, was widespread.<sup>11</sup>

The inequalities apparent in Table 1, furthermore, were growing over time. Table 2 shows that the gap between the wealthiest and the rest had grown by 1810, with the richest decile owning over 70 percent of taxable wealth. The number of nontaxables, however, and their proportion in the population, had declined, although, as we shall see, this had much to do with disproportionate outmigration by the poor. By 1820, moreover, after outmigration had declined and once the population of household heads had risen again, both inequality and the extent of poverty had increased. Table 3 shows that in 1820 the richest decile owned over three-quarters of taxable wealth, while nontaxables had grown in number to over a thousand and had become a majority of household heads.

For various reasons, however, these figures understate the extent of inequality. Some of those reasons have to do with tax assessment practices, such as rating property at considerably less than market value. In 1800, for instance, assessors valued prime-aged male and female slaves at \$120.15 and \$80.10, respectively, yet they sold for two to three times those sums: Reverend Brooke's slaves, children and the elderly included, were worth over \$160 each, according to his inventory. Rural land without taxable built improvements was assessed at an average of \$1.63 per acre, yet usually sold for between \$5 and \$25, or even more with particularly high quality soil and farm improvements. When county officials doublechecked assessed value of land in 1801, taxable values were still well below market values.

As well as under-assessment, under-reporting also minimized apparent differentials between rich and poor. Assessors only updated their records by visiting households once every several years, while in the meantime property owners were

Table 3: *Distribution of Total Wealth, 1820*

%/no. of householders		Value	% of value	Cum. %	Mean value
10	180	1,230,732.69	76.1	76.1	6,837.40
10	179	246,684.43	15.3	91.4	1,378.13
10	180	96,031.60	5.9	97.3	533.51
10	179	36,095.53	2.2	99.6	201.65
4	71	7,055.28	0.4	100	99.37
56	1,006	0	0	100	100
Total	1,795	1,616,599.53	100	100	900.61

supposed to inform the levy court when they acquired new property or when slaves crossed age barriers. This they manifestly failed to do, for recorded property holdings invariably remained static for unfeasible periods of time until suddenly increasing dramatically. Thus, assessments in 1800 recorded 10,830 slaves while the census-takers found 12,191, and there were over 400,000 acres of land in the county, rather than the 330,000 and declining number recorded for the levy.<sup>12</sup> Most of the missing thousand-plus slaves and 70,000 acres would more likely have belonged to wealthier rather than poorer people.

Another factor leading to under-representation of gaps between rich and poor, as derived from local tax lists, is that up to 30 percent of property (in addition to that accounted for in the Tables) was recorded as being owned by people who either lived in a household in which someone else was deemed by census-takers to be the head, or resided somewhere other than Prince George's County, or had died and whose property had not yet been divided among creditors and heirs. It seems likely that wealthy nonhousehold heads would have lived in households headed by someone wealthier rather than someone poorer, in which case some of the rich households were even more opulent than figures based on household heads alone will show. Absentee-owned property in Prince George's raises questions about Prince Georgians owning property elsewhere. It seems safe to suppose that those who held large properties outside the county were among the wealthier residents within the county, and that perhaps many of the county's richest people held some property elsewhere. The Calverts of Riversdale, for example, had taxable wealth of \$13,951.38 in 1800, including 3,325 acres of land and seventy-six slaves, and were Prince George's seventh wealthiest family (and would eventually be its wealthiest by far). In addition to their Prince Georgian holdings, though, the Calverts also owned, at various points in the early 1800s, 875 acres of land in neighboring Montgomery County, plots of land in Washington, D.C., and Alexandria, Virginia,

Table 4: *Frequency of Land- and Slaveownership, 1800, 1810, 1820*

Group	1800 No.	% of 1,712	1810 No.	% of 1,620	1820 No.	% of 1,795
Landed taxables	524	30.6	531	32.8	462	25.7
Nonlanded taxables	406	23.7	429	26.5	327	18.2
Nontaxables	782	45.7	660	40.7	1,006	56.0
Total landless	1,188	69.4	1,089	67.2	1,333	74.3
Slaveowning taxables	652	38.1	589	36.4	539	30.0
Nonslaveowning taxables	278	16.2	371	22.9	250	13.9
Nontaxables	782	45.7	660	40.7	1,006	56.0
Total nonslaveowners	1,060	61.9	1,031	63.6	1,256	70.0

stocks in various banks and in a Georgetown manufacturing company of which George Calvert was a director, and government bonds.<sup>13</sup> One might assume that the eventual disposition of property from the estates of the deceased was ultimately a socioeconomic leveler, but inheritance was the principal means by which wealthier people acquired property in the early nineteenth century, and, besides, as we shall see, life-cycle mobility made little difference to general inequality.<sup>14</sup>

Prince Georgians were differentiated by what kind of property they owned as well as by how much. The 782 nontaxables obviously owned no land or slaves, nor did a good many of the taxables. Indeed, as in Table 4, 406 taxables were nonlandowners, leaving a total of 524 landowners and 1,188 nonlandowners out of 1,712 household heads: a nonlandownership rate of 69.4 percent. Furthermore, although landlessness fell to 67.2 percent by 1810, it rose to 74.3 percent by 1820. Surprisingly, perhaps, Table 4 also shows that slaveholding was more extensive than landownership, although nonslaveholding still encompassed a majority of 61.9 percent in 1800 rising to 63.7 percent in 1810 and 70 percent in 1820.<sup>15</sup>

The decline in landholding in the early nineteenth century represented the continuation of a process in which ownership rates in the tidewater Chesapeake had fallen from 70 percent in the late seventeenth century to 50 percent by the time of the American Revolution. The decline in slaveownership between 1800 and 1820, however, was a reversal of expansion throughout the eighteenth century. It is worth suggesting, then, that the late 1850s fall in slaveownership represented a return to downward trends, or was at least symptomatic of fluctuation, while stability in slaveownership rates at about 30 percent from the 1820s to the mid-1850s was aberrant.<sup>16</sup>

Not all the landless and slaveless were poor. Mary Wootton, for instance, had no land to her name but owned over £2,000 in personalty in 1800, including sixty-one



*At the Request of Samuel Snowden the following Release was Granted Decr 1781  
I Samuel Snowden of Prince Georges County in Maryland Do hereby set free from  
Bondage my thirty five Negroes as hereafter named Wt. Nick about thirty Samuyl*

Above, Montpelier, home of the Snowden family (Maryland Historical Society). Below, Samuel Snowden (1732–1801) freed his slaves in 1781 and then relied on wage workers. (Maryland State Archives.)

slaves, and certainly had use of over 1,500 acres of land recorded in the name of “Turner Wootton heirs.”<sup>17</sup> In all, 239 nonlandowners, over 20 percent of the landless, were slaveholders. Most—145—were small-scale owners of fewer than five slaves, but eight others besides Mary Wootton held twenty slaves or more. Samuel Snowden, on the other hand, third largest landowner in the county in 1800, freed his seventy-one slaves in 1781, relying on wage workers and tenants to tend his 5,703 acres thereafter. Of sixty-nine planters with over eight hundred acres in 1800 (landholdings which could sustain twenty laborers or more), Snowden was one of only three nonslaveholders.<sup>18</sup> Like Clement Brooke, most large landowners were large slaveholders, and vice versa. Most people, however, owned neither slaves nor land, numbering 949 and forming 55.4 percent of householders in 1800. One hundred sixty-seven of them owned some taxable property, but the rest, Charles Jones and Priscilla Howington included, owned none. Those without the two principal forms of capital in this plantation-agricultural county in 1810 and 1820 respectively numbered 884 and 1,143, and formed 54.6 and 63.7 percent of householders.

Table 5: *Upward Mobility among Nontaxables, Nonslaveholders, and Nonlandowners, 1800–1810–1820*

Group	No. survivors to 1810		No./% upwardly mobile	No. survivors to 1820		No./% upwardly mobile
Nontaxables	217	121	55.8	78	38	48.7
Nonslaveholders	347	74	21.3	135	41	30.4
Nonlandowners	396	74	18.7	158	46	29.1

The existence of slavery reminds us that the figures given so far actually tell us less than half the story of inequality and poverty in this tobacco county. In 1800, 12,191 people, 57.6 percent of Prince Georgians, did not even own themselves. There were 8,984 free people in 1,712 households, a rate of 5.25 persons per household: if we assume the same average household size among slaves, then we can extrapolate another 2,322 household heads from the enslaved population. If we count slaves as potential property owners and subtract the value of slave property from the figures given, then \$771,020 divided among 4,034 households represents a per capita wealth of \$191.13, considerably less than the \$709.38 per capita in the free population, making Prince George's County seem somewhat less opulent than mean property ownership in Table 1 suggests. It is interesting to note, moreover, that an emancipation in 1800 would have left Prince George's County with 930 taxable and 3,104 nontaxable households, or 23 percent taxable and 77 percent nontaxable.<sup>19</sup>

The free population of 8,984 in 1800 also included a disproportionately poor group of 648 free African Americans in 123 households. Only eight black heads of household qualified for the local levy. The free black community, 7.2 percent of the free population, altogether held \$2,028.91, or 0.2 percent of taxable property. Mean taxable wealth among all free black households was \$16.50. Including the estimated 2,322 slave households, average wealth among 2,445 African-American heads of household was eighty-three cents. The white population, 8,336 people in 1,589 households, 39.4 percent of all households and 92.8 percent of free households, owned \$1,212,431.57, or 99.8 percent of the wealth and \$763.02 per household. But, while 115 of Prince George's 782 nontaxable householders were black, another 667 were white. With 42 percent of white householders nontaxable, poverty in the white population was pervasive.<sup>20</sup>

Some of these poorer people were eventually able to obtain property. Table 5 reveals extensive mobility among those who remained in the county to 1810 and 1820. Over half of the nontaxables of 1800 became taxables by 1810, and just under half of those who survived and stayed in Prince George's did so by 1820. Also, just



*Court clerks recorded alms dispensed to the local poor in this second Prince George's County courthouse (1801–1881). (Prince George's County Historical Society.)*

over one in five erstwhile nonslaveholders became slaveholders over the course of one decade, almost one in three over two decades. The numbers of hitherto landless householders who became landowners was the same and slightly higher over one and two decades respectively, although they formed slightly smaller proportions of the erstwhile nonlandowning population.

These figures give a somewhat deceptive impression of high mobility, however. First, mobility took the form of small steps, not large leaps. Forty-eight, almost 40 percent, of the nontaxables who became taxables by 1810 remained inside the wealthiest half of the free population, and another thirty-five, close to 30 percent, only aspired to the fifth decile. Fourteen of those who subsequently survived to 1820 moved another rung or two up the ladder, but seventeen returned to the nontaxable category. Similarly, eight of the new slaveholders of 1810 fell back into nonslaveholding by 1820, as did five of the new landowners. Also, although

Table 6: *Disappearance Rates, 1800–1810–1820*

Group	No. in 1800	No. gone by 1810	%	No. gone by 1820	%
Taxables	930	460	49.5	740	79.6
Nontaxables	782	565	72.3	704	90.0
Slaveholders	652	312	47.9	517	79.3
Nonslaveholders	1,060	713	67.3	926	87.4
Landowners	524	233	44.5	415	79.2
Nonlandowners	1,188	792	66.7	1,029	86.6

the records do not permit systematic analysis of how all the upwardly mobile acquired their new property, evidence from wills suggests that inheritance was the main means of doing so, and there is little in the land records to indicate that poorer people were especially active in slave or real estate markets.

Furthermore, the survivor figures above account for a relatively small proportion of the population, and one which probably had a higher level of upward mobility than the rest. There is no way of counting exactly how many of those who disappeared from the census did so because they died, abdicated the headship of household, or migrated. Yet it appears from Table 6 that the poor must have migrated disproportionately, suggesting that many of those who stayed behind expected to gain by doing so, while the poor in many cases migrated because they had no such expectations but thought they might gain by moving. Almost three-quarters of the nontaxables of 1800 disappeared from the record by 1810, compared to half the taxables, and nine of ten nontaxables disappeared by 1820, compared to eight of ten taxables. The disappearance rate was lowest at the top end of the scale, with seventy-four, or 43.3 percent, from the wealthiest decile absent by 1810 (although 136, or 80 percent, disappeared by 1820—probably because they tended to be older and thus died more frequently). Fewer than half of slave- and landowners disappeared over one decade, compared to two-thirds of non-owners. Eighty percent of slave- and landowners disappeared over two compared to 90 percent non-owners. If wealthier people were older on average and thus disappeared more frequently from the record through death, as is likely, then these figures understate the differential between migration and persistence based on wealth.<sup>21</sup>

Bayly Ellen Marks made similar findings about migration from St. Mary's County, discovering that between the 1790s and 1830s 67 percent of outmigrants were nontaxables, 55 percent were slaveless, and 90 percent were landless. She also found that about 13 percent of migrants moved to other Maryland counties, 5 percent to Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, and the rest further



Ordered by the court that John Hall magister pay to John H. Hall the sum of 100. Dollars for one weeks support of a Saary Swann a young child whose Mother has left it - and for sending the child to the Poor House (Sd. ad)

The levy court paid John Hall (above) and Charity Lowe (below) for their care of abandoned children. (Maryland State Archives.)

afield, including 72 percent who moved to Kentucky. We can make some suppositions about the likely fate of these various migrants based on other people's scholarship. Marks herself shows that socioeconomic conditions in St. Mary's County—where, in 1800, 5 percent of taxables owned a third of taxable wealth, 40 percent of free householders were nontaxables, and 65 percent were landless, rising to 75 percent by 1840—were similar to those in Prince George's. According to Jackson Turner Main, landlessness rates were as high as 75 percent in some late-eighteenth-century Virginia tobacco counties. It seems unlikely, then, that local migration within the tidewater tobacco region benefited people much.<sup>22</sup>

The same goes for most of those migrating farther afield. Lee Soltow, Fredrika Teute, and Elizabeth Perkins found extensive inequality of condition and opportunity in the tobacco west. In 1792, 65 percent of residents of the new state of Kentucky were landless, as were as many as 84 percent in certain districts. Land prices, beginning at \$1 per unimproved acre, rising to \$2 for improved acres and up to \$60 for prime riverbank land, were too high for many poorer migrants to buy farms. Although speculators inaugurated a deferred payment practice in 1797, and prices fell to \$20 per hundred acres, landlessness still stood at 52 percent in 1802. When the government discontinued a credit scheme in 1806, many lost their

133  
Ordered that Thomas Tyler and William Wells Proprietors at Queen Anne Warehouse pay to Charity Lowe a ~~single~~ <sup>monthly</sup> sum of Twenty dollars for the purpose of supporting and maintaining an Infant found by the said Charity for Twelve Months - ad or del

newly acquired land, and in 1821 a third of Kentucky realty remained in the hands of out-of-state banks and speculators. It is more difficult to arrive at the likely fate of migrants to the wheat regions of Maryland, Virginia, and further north, or of those who moved to cities. It may be that poorer people who moved to more egalitarian non-plantation farming areas prospered more often than others. It is probable, however, that those who swelled the ranks of the rapidly growing urban industrial workforce of the early nineteenth century did not.<sup>23</sup>

Some people may have escaped propertylessness, then, but many died as poor as Charles Jones and Priscilla Howington. Moreover, there is evidence that significant numbers lived close to destitution and sometimes suffered subsistence crises from which only public assistance could rescue them. Some people's need for poor relief arose from tragic personal circumstances. In July 1801, Prince George's Levy Court paid the splendidly named Charity Lowe "Twenty dollars for the purpose of supporting and maintaining an Infant found by the said Charity for Twelve Months." The following year the court gave John H. Hall "Two Dollars for one Weeks support of Sauncy Swann, a young Child whose Mother has left it — and for sending the Child to the Poor House." While Sauncy Swan went to the "Poor House," there is no record of what became of the child Charity Lowe found. Nor is it known what caused the parents of these children to abandon them, but we can fairly suppose that those parents also suffered terrible privation.<sup>24</sup>

Although such starts in life were inauspicious, children sent to the almshouse were taught trades and thereby equipped to make a living. The Orphans' Court proceedings and land records contain numerous instances of young boys and girls apprenticed to learn various crafts. For some people, though, life ended in poverty-stricken circumstances. In 1803 the levy court paid Dr. Alexander Mitchell \$12.25 for "nursing and burying" Martin Murphy, "a poor travelling man." Rather than having been forced into vagrancy, it is possible that Murphy chose the freedom of peripatetic poverty over the confinements of other lifestyles. Whatever the case, he seems to have had no family or friends to rely on in his time of greatest need. He died, though, in the care of the community in the form of a local physician who was compensated by the public purse. In this last respect he was luckier than some. In 1805 Joseph Schofield received \$8 from the levy court "for digging [a] grave . . . and making a coffin" for James Fletcher, "a Mulatto Man . . . found dead on the public road." James Fletcher appears to have died homeless, possibly of exposure, perhaps unnoticed by anyone until someone had to bury him.<sup>25</sup>

The county provided a rudimentary safety net for the extremely poor, notwithstanding that Martin Murphy, James Fletcher, and others occasionally fell through it. The levy court annually paid the county almshouse trustees sums which normally ranged from \$500 to \$1,500, although no other records survive to enlighten us about the people housed there. The court also provided money, usually \$10 to \$20, to patrons for the support of individual almshouse outpensioners.

*Rosalie Stier Calvert (1778–1821), wife of George Calvert (1768–1838) of Riversdale, described the hardship she witnessed among the county's poor in letters to her family in Belgium. (Maryland Historical Society.)*



There were only two such Prince Georgian recipients of levy court poor relief in 1800, although more might have needed or wanted it. In 1805 there were four outpensioners, and in 1808 there were twenty-four. It appears, therefore, that a flood in 1804, a drought in 1806, and the trade embargo in 1807 rendered a small but growing number of people unable to make their own subsistence.<sup>26</sup>

The long years of trade interruption from the embargo of 1807 through the War of 1812 were disastrous for large numbers of people, and a wheat crop failure in 1816 was for many the final straw. On January 30 next, responding to grain shortage, the Maryland Assembly passed an "An Act for the temporary relief of the poor in the several Counties in this State" requiring levy courts to provide an emergency dole. The justices of Prince George's Levy Court acted quickly, meeting on February 21 and appointing eighteen of the county's most prominent citizens "to enquire into the situation of the Poor in their respective Neighbourhoods and . . . to report to the Court on Saturday the first of March next the names of all those whom they may discover to be such objects of distress as to require immediate relief." On March 1 members of the court procured an immediate loan of \$1,500 and authorized themselves to obtain a further \$1,000 "as soon as circumstances will admit of it." The same day, the court gave several benefactors no less than \$2,175 to distribute among no fewer than 139 people. It also provided another \$675 for the aid of forty-four more people on March 17, \$255 for thirty others on May 19, and \$35 for another four on July 7. In addition to this total of \$3,140 for 217 people, the court allocated \$500 for the almshouse on August 6.<sup>27</sup>

Although there were no doubt philanthropic motives for the 1817 dole, its administrators were not averse to making a little profit from it. The loan which

*Doctor Joseph Kent (1779–1837). The court appointed Kent and twelve influential residents to investigate the worsening conditions of the county's poor in 1817. (Courtesy of the Maryland Commission on Artistic Property of the Maryland State Archives, MSA SC 1545-1009.)*



the justices raised was obtained from John Read Magruder Jr., the levy court's clerk. This may have been expedient—an important consideration under such urgent circumstances—but it is notable that the justices and clerk arranged an 8 percent interest rate, 2 percent higher than planters normally expected from investment in land, stocks, and bonds.<sup>28</sup>

More significantly, perhaps, the manner in which the money was supposed to be given reflected planters' sense of social superiority. In the first place, wealthy men were asked to "enquire into the situation of the Poor" and then report back to the court; it was not intended that the destitute should define their own needs or claim alms as of right. Also, as with outpensioners in other years, money was not provided directly to those in need but given to a patron "to be applied in such a manner as he may judge most effectual to relieve the said out Pensioners from Suffering." Beneficence, then, was tempered by the court seemingly depriving the needy of their freedoms as consumers and rendering them beholden to wealthy patrons. Despite these provisions, though, it is probable that in practice some sort of dialogue occurred between patrons and benefactors in which the latter's views on their own needs and how they should be accommodated may have been both aired and respected. Because the court directed its patrons to "enquire into the situation of the Poor in their respective Neighbourhoods," they would have been familiar with the individual needs and wishes of their particular charges, and taking those wishes and needs into account would probably have been the "most

effectual" way "to relieve the said out Pensioners from Suffering." If so, then alms recipients were not mere "objects," as the levy court described them, but to some extent agents in the provision of their own welfare, even if there is no doubt that they were in distress and required immediate relief.<sup>29</sup>

However large or small a role recipients played in the distribution of the dole, most of them were already among the most economically vulnerable of Prince Georgians before the wheat crop failed. Of those identifiable in the censuses or tax records, forty were nontaxables in either 1800 or 1810 or both. Of those who were taxables, most owned only a small amount of "other" property. A few had once been quite well off but had fallen on hard times by 1817. Among them was Elizabeth Hill, who had owned \$1,963.73 in 1800 and \$2,887.95 in 1810, including 382 acres of land and fifteen and eighteen slaves in the respective years.<sup>30</sup> Another was Elizabeth Eastwood, who had owned one hundred acres in 1800 and 1810, respectively worth \$60.08 and \$153.53.<sup>31</sup> Patrick Sim also received alms in 1817, although he had been in dire straits for some time. He was once fairly prosperous, probably an artisan, with \$1,108.85 to his name in 1800, including two acres of land in Beall Town, worth \$203.88, and eight slaves, worth \$488.61. He was a nontaxable by 1810, however, and in January 1812 John Hodges of Thomas received \$40 from the levy court for past and future "support of Patrick Sim who is in very indigent circumstances."<sup>32</sup> Charles Proctor and his wife (she was unnamed in the list) were members of Prince George's materially poor free black community. So, probably, were Esther Churb and Kitty Gray, both surnames belonging exclusively to extended free black families in Prince George's in the early 1800s.<sup>33</sup>

Of those who cannot be traced, many must have been widows left without means of support. This appears to have been the case with "Tobias Belts Widow," whose husband had once owned \$2,829.21, including 590 acres of land and fourteen slaves, but who had perhaps died indebted, and with "Benjamin Jones Wife & Children," whose husband and father had been a nontaxable.<sup>34</sup> Many other women were not noted as someone's wife or widow, such as "Elizabeth Stone her Daughter Eliza Thompson & child" but may also have been widowed, divorced, or separated. Some of the young people on the list of 1817 were apparently orphans, such as the "Children of Thomas Littleford," whose father had been a nontaxable in 1800 but had owned \$200.25 in "other" property in 1810.<sup>35</sup> All told, 65 men, 127 women, and 24 children received alms under the 1817 Act for the Temporary Relief of the Poor (one first name is indecipherable and the person's sex is thus not known). Clearly, a large number of Prince Georgians were, for various reasons, too poor to cope with economic emergency.

There was, then, great inequality of wealth distribution in early national Prince George's County. Most significantly, large numbers of free people depended on others for a living, and many of them were unable to support themselves in times of economic crisis. These people and their predicaments did not feature in agrar-

ian discourses about the predominance of the independent husbandman in the early republic. And they have rarely featured in historical renderings of early national rural society because “republican synthesis” historians have tended to rely on those discourses as the definitive intellectual or linguistic “constructions” of reality at the time. Many colonial and a few early national historians have done things differently, though, and reached different conclusions. Rather than relying on such texts, which perhaps say more about the often elite writers than about the subjects and society they purported to describe, they have used locally based, often quantifiable sources which allow a close-up and detailed view of people and their social and economic circumstances. This essay has tried to do the same, and perhaps the cumulation of knowledge from such sources will eventually help us more fully to appreciate the extent of poverty and the conditions of the poor in the early national tobacco plantation South.

Yet the line between quantifiable and literary sources is perhaps not as clear as we sometimes think. The measurable data contained in tax lists and inventories, for instance, was often accompanied by qualitative information, such as the description of many of Priscilla Howington’s possessions as “old.” Indeed, quantifiable evidence can itself sometimes be read as a kind of text. The appendix, a transcription of the lists of patrons and outpensioners, and the amount of money allocated for each outpensioner (or group thereof), made by the levy court between March and July 1817, is an example. In a most basic sense, it is a table of names and numbers which quantifies economic dependence and at least temporary destitution. But it is also a kind of text which, by revealing people and privations overlooked by agrarian writers, argues powerfully against yeoman-republican discourse and warns us not to be seduced by it.

## Appendix

### *Recipients of Poor Relief and their Patrons* *March to July, 1817*

The levy court gave money to patrons of the poor on four different days in 1817. The dates, names of patrons (*italics*) and recipients, and the allocation (in U.S. dollars) for each recipient (or group thereof) are listed below. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are as in the original document. Prince George’s County Levy Court, Proceedings, February 21, 1817, 603; March 1, 1817, 604–16; March 17, 1817, 621–24; May 19, 1817, 626–29; and July 7, 1817, 639–40.

#### *March 1, 1817*

*Josias Jones*: Elizabeth Stone her Daughter Eliza Thompson & child, 30, Edward Welsh & Wife, 20, Ruth Hinton & her children, 25, Elizabeth & Ann Cross, 20, James White & his four children, 20, Margaret Miller, 15, Mary Hyatt, 15; *Dr.*

*Samuel Franklin*: Sibby Felton & her two Daughters, 15, Sarah Mitchell & Elizabeth, 30, Charlotte Baldwin & her three children, 20, Jacob H. Waters & his Sister Rachel Donnison, 25, Uriah Mitchel & his Daughter & her child, 20, Isaac Clark, 15, Mary Brashears, 15, Nancy Hinton & her two Children, 25; *William Dudley Digges and Jasper M. Jackson*: Jane Thompson, 15, Mrs Haywood, 25, Thomas Baldwin, 10, Mrs Magee, 30, Henry Fowler & five children, 20; *William Hebb*: Mary Ridgeway, 20, Jemima Allen, 20, Jacob King, 30, Thomas Cook, 15, Lenna Hurley, 30, Mrs Locker, 15, Susanna Tenby, 15; *Thomas Mundell, Horatio McEldery, William Marshall*: John Thorn, 20, Ann Thomas, 10, Mrs Tracy, 15, Theodore Glasgow, 20, Thomas Barton, 15, Milly Thompson & Daughter, 15, Jeremiah Ivington, 20, Miss Knotts, 20, Miss Gregory, 10, John Martin, 20, William Rowe, 10, Osborn White, 15, Hannah Lucas & her Daughter, 10, Joseph Gales, 20, Lewis Dent, 15, Thomas Underwood, 15, Levin Webster, 30, Mrs Boswell, 15, Luke Day, 15, Mrs Richards, 20, Basil Talbot, 15, James Atchison, 15, Mary Short, 15, Luke Thompson, 15, Mrs Howard, 20; *Francis Magruder and Edward Henry Calvert*: Caroline Mullikin, 20, Henrietta Thompson, 15, Elizabeth Price, 20, Priscilla Vermillion, 20, Mary Fowler, 20, Ann Beckett, 15, Ruth Brown wife of M Brown, 20, Druscilla Mitchell, 15, Elizabeth Free, 15, Patrick Sim, 20, Lydia Clereland, 15; *Francis M Hall*: Mrs Ryon Widow of Thomas Ryon, 25, Samuel Mockbee, 25, William Russell, 10; *Richard W West*: Jonathon White, 30, Thomas Fry, 25, Archibald White, 20, Margaret Winkler, 30, George Winkler, 30; *Edward Henry Calvert and William Marbury*: James Carroll, 30, Sarah Sansberrie, 15, Aquilla Wilson, 20, Lydia Kidwell, 20, Zachariah Scott, 15, John King, 20, Francis Walker, 20, Joseph Barrott, 15, Hilleary Piles, 15, Zadock Reston, 15; *Thomas Somerville*: Ann Richards, 20, Elizabeth Eastwood, 20, Elizabeth Richards, 20, Priscilla Collins, 20, Elizabeth Carrico, 20, Elizabeth Devan, 20, Sarah Cooksey, 20, Ann Williams, 20, Monica Carrico, 20, Rebecca Lynch, 20, Mary Bedds, 20; *Robert Bowie and Edward Henry Calvert*: Ann Tarvin, 15, Ann Gardiner, 25, Mary Venables, 25, Elizabeth Venables, 15, Mary Magruder, 25, Sarah Linthicum, 25, Elizabeth Nowell, 25, Elizabeth Worrell, 25, Mrs Crook, 15, Mrs Hazard, 25, Mrs Mobberly, 15, Joanna Retter, 15, Dennis Curton, 20; *David Craufurd*: Sarah Ryan, 15, Sarah Burgess, 30, Esther Churb, 20; *Samuel Clagett*: John Garner, 20, Rebecca Dorsett & her three Sisters, 60

#### March 17, 1817

*Henry A Callis*: Charles Tenbys Widow, 25, Mrs Ralph, 15, Thomas Biggs, 15, Mrs Summers, 15, Kitty Gray, 10; *William Hebb*: Richard Ridgway, 15, William Palmer, 20, Henry B Thorn, 20; *Francis Magruder*: John McDowell, 15, Ann Keadle, 15, Elizabeth Arnold, 15, Ann Hay, 10, Rachel Hunter, 10, Benjamin Cooke, 15, Esther Stone, 15, Ann Webster, 15, Eleanor Summers, 15; *Dr Joseph Kent and William A Fitzgerald*: Mrs Hinton, 30, Sarah Barron, 20, Rachel Deakins, 25, Catherine

Medcalf, 20, Mary Danford, 15, Ann Onions, 10, Julia Neal, 15, Benjamin Jones Wife & Children, 25, Jacob Brown, 20, Tobias Belts Widow, 30, Sarah Riddle, 15, Rebecca Brashears, 10, Eleanor Clarke, 10, John Brashears Wife and Children, 20, Oliver B Suit, 30; *Edward Henry Calvert*: Elizabeth Swann and Daughter, 15, Eleana Burgess and Daughter Priscilla Day, 15, Mary Barklay, 15, Thomas Mullikin, 30, John Sansberrie, 15; *Trueman Tyler*: Henrietta Young, 15

May 19, 1817

*Thomas Mundell*: Elisha Arvin, 10, Thomas Arvin, 10, Price Collins, 10, Elizabeth Hill, 8, Luke Windsor, 5, Edward Curtain, 5; *Francis Magruder*: Mary Roby, 15, Ann Weaver, 10, Elizabeth Weaver, 8, Sarah Allen, 5, Ann Vermillion, 8, Letty Day, 5, Mary Willing, 15; *Dr Joseph Kent*: Nathaniel Hall, 10, Hetty Brashears, 10, C[ary?] Vermillion, 8, Lucy Vermillion, 8, Fielder Hays, 8, Richard Martin, 8, Zachariah Halsall, 10, Lucy Hinton, 5; *Edward Henry Calvert*: Charles Proctor & wife, 16, Elizabeth Griffin, 8, Elizabeth Power, 10, James Mobberly & wife, 10; *David Craufurd*: the Children of Thomas Littleford, 20; *Dr Samuel Franklin*: Allen Harvey, 10

July 7, 1817

*Thomas Mundell*: Nehemiah Kidwell, 5, James Hill, 5, Mrs Wood, 5; *William Dudley Digges*: Thomas Baldwin wife, 10

## NOTES

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1. Real Property, 1800, 41, Prince George's County Tax Assessments [PGCTA].
2. Federal Direct Tax, 1798, Prince George's County, Maryland [FDTPG], Collington and Western Branch Hundreds, Particular List of Slaves, 1; Particular List of Dwelling Houses, 2; Particular List of Land, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 3.
3. Inventories, January 15, 1801, ST 4, 88-100, Prince George's County Register of Wills [PGCRW].
4. *Ibid.*, January 22, 1802, ST 4, 244.
5. *Ibid.*, March 10, 1802, ST 4, 266.
6. Aubrey C. Land, "Economic Base and Social Structure: The Northern Chesapeake in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History*, 25 (1965): 639-54; Russell R. Menard, "From Servant to Freeholder: Status, Mobility and Property Accumulation in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser., 30 (1973): 37-64; Menard, P. M. G. Harris, and Lois Green Carr, "Opportunity and Inequality: The Distribution of Wealth on



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8. Jackson Turner Main, “The Distribution of Property in Post-Revolutionary Virginia,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 61 (1954): 241–58; Sarah Shaver Hughes, “Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782–1810: The Economic and Social Structure of a Tidewater County in the Early National Years” (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1975); Bayly Ellen Marks, “Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System: St. Mary’s County, Maryland, 1790–1840” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1979); Lee Soltow, “Land Inequality on the Frontier: The Distribution of Land in East Tennessee at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century,” *Social Science History*, 5 (1981): 275–91; “Kentucky Wealth at the End of the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History*, 43 (1983): 617–33; *Distribution of Wealth and Income in the United States in 1798* (Pittsburgh, 1989); Fredrika J. Teute, “Land, Liberty and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era: Kentucky as the Promised Land” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988).
9. Jean B. Russo, “Free Workers in a Plantation Economy: Talbot County, Maryland, 1690–1759” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983); “Self-sufficiency and Local Exchange: Free Craftsmen in the Rural Chesapeake Economy,” in Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 389–432; Christine Daniels, “Alternative Workers in a Slave Economy: Kent County, Maryland, 1675–1810” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1990); “‘Getting his [or her] Livelihood’: Free Workers in Slave Anglo-America, 1675–1810,” *Agricultural History*, 71 (1997): 125–61; Willard F. Bliss, “The Rise of Tenancy in Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 58 (1950): 427–41; Lorena S. Walsh, “Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder: Estate Management and Tenant Fortunes in Southern Maryland, 1642–1820,” *Agricultural History*, 59 (1985): 373–96; Steven Sarson, “Landlessness and Tenancy in Early National Prince George’s County, Maryland,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 57 (2000): 569–98.
10. Prince George’s County Levy Court [PGCLC], Proceedings, February 21, 1817, 603.
11. Maryland county levy courts produced annual property assessments detailing ownership of land (including built improvements and town lots), slaves (divided by age and sex),

plate (gold and silver), and "other" property (livestock, stills, ready cash, riding carriages, vessels over twenty tons, and, after 1813, some furniture and farm equipment): William Kilty, *Laws of Maryland, 1776–1818, revised and collected under the authority of the legislature* (Annapolis, 1820), 1784, chapter 4; 1797, chapter 34; 1812, chapter 141. These tables are derived from matching assessments against censuses for 1800, 1810, and 1820. Assessments for Prince George's County are extant from 1792, although the earliest are rendered partly illegible by mold. Unfortunately, the federal census population schedules for Prince George's for 1830 are lost. My total figures, derived from the tax and census schedules, sometimes differ, in some cases markedly, from the summary totals given by assessors and census takers who occasionally made arithmetical errors. Also, until 1813 property was assessed in Maryland pounds, shillings, and pence, but for convenience and to enable easy cross-referencing with 1820 I have converted amounts into dollars at the levy court's rate of £1 : \$2.67. For a more detailed discussion of total wealth distribution see Steven Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor in the Tobacco-Plantation South: Prince George's County, Maryland, in the Early National Era" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 35–75, 167–207, 437–40.

12. Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States, 1800, Prince George's County, Maryland, 491.

13. Real Property, 1800, 24, 25, 30; Personal Property, 1800, 28, PGCTA; Margaret Law Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795–1821* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 384–86, 393 n. 64; Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 253–92; Wills, June 8, 1835, PC 1, 89–90, PGCRW.

14. Any attempt to correct under-representation of property ownership in tax assessment entails a high risk of inaccuracy because of the number of unknown or incompletely known factors involved. It is safest, therefore, to take the local assessment figures for resident household heads as a base-line measure of inequality which we can supplement with evidence from inventories as above. For further analysis of methods used and problems in wealth distribution analysis see Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 37–45.

15. For more detail see Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 76–119, 208–51.

16. Lois Green Carr, "County Government in Maryland, 1689–1709" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1968), 581–97; Edward C. Papenfuss Jr., "Planter Behavior and Economic Opportunity in a Staple Economy," *Agricultural History*, 46 (1972): 301–2; Carville V. Earle, *Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System: All Hallow's Parish, Maryland, 1650–1783* (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography, Research Paper no. 170, 1975), 206–12; Gregory A. Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty: Tenancy in Eighteenth-Century Maryland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), xii; Russell R. Menard, *Economy and Society in Early Colonial Maryland* (New York: Garland Press, 1985), 51–77, 155–201, 302–20; Walsh, "Land, Landlord, and Leaseholder," 373–96; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 131–41, 152–61, 296–97.

17. Real Property, 1800, 28, 29, 43; Personal Property, 1800, 3, 31, 44, PGCTA; Wills, T 1, April 12, 1797, 397, PGCRW.

18. Samuel Snowden to his slaves, Manumission, FF 1, 135–37, June 12, 1781, 135–37, Prince George's County Land Records [PGCLR]; FF 2, September 27, 1785, 431–32; FDTPG, Eastern Branch and Rock Creek Hundreds, Particular List of Dwelling Houses, 4; Particular List of Lands, Lots, Buildings, and Wharves, 7; PGCTA, Real Property, 1800, 32; Personal Property, 1800, 38.

19. Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States, 1800, Prince George's County, Maryland, 491.

20. See also Marks, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System," 227–28, 437–44,

Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 217–49, and Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 29–30, 37–38, 69–71, 83.

21. For further detail see Sarson, "Wealth, Poverty, and Labor," 120–66.

22. Marks, "Economics and Society in a Staple Plantation System," 110–40, 221–40, 303–18; "The Rage for Kentucky: Emigration from St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1790–1810," in Robert D. Mitchell and Edward K. Muller, eds., *Geographical Perspectives on Maryland's Past*, University of Maryland Occasional Papers in Geography, 4 (1979): 108–28; Main, "Distribution of Wealth in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," 242–45. Prince Georgian inequality was greater than that in the nation as a whole, where the top tenth possessed 45 percent of taxable wealth. Inequality was greater in the South than in the North, and greatest in the lowlands as opposed to the uplands where slavery and plantation agriculture had not fully developed. See Soltow, *Distribution of Wealth and Income*, 171, 236.

23. Teute, "Land, Liberty, and Labor," 184–311; Soltow, "Land Inequality on the Frontier," 275–91; Soltow, "Kentucky Wealth at the End of the Eighteenth Century," 620–22; Elizabeth Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History*, 78 (1991): 486–510. I am grateful to Prof. Ronald Hoffman for his thoughts about rural-urban migrants made at the Early Americanists in Britain and Ireland conference, Brunel University, May 1999. A systematic study of the possibly varying fates of migrants from particular places to a variety of destinations would be a painstaking but perhaps a very revealing research project.

24. Proceedings, July 16, 1801, 133; June 9, 1802, 162, PGCLC.

25. Levy Lists, 1800, 1; 1803, 4; 1805, 5; Proceedings, May 21, 1800, 114; June 8, 1807, 289; July 14, 1807, 292–93, Levy Book, 1803, 613; 1805, 634, PGCLC.

26. Rosalie Calvert recorded the hardships caused, especially for the poor, by the flood, the drought, and the embargo in various letters at the time. See Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale*, 85–86, 88–89, 147, 181, 190, 195, 198, 201.

27. Kilty, *Laws of Maryland*, 1817, Chapter 192; Proceedings, February 21, 1817, 603; March 1, 1817, 604–616; March 17, 1817, 621–624; May 19, 1817, 626–629; July 7, 1817, 639–640; August 6, 1817, 648, PGCLC. In adding up the number of people on the levy court's lists, I assumed that when the number of children were unspecified there were two children. I have also assumed that "Benjamin Jones Wife & Children," for example, meant just the wife and (two) children, as opposed to "Charles Proctor & wife," which clearly means two people. If I have erred, therefore, it is on the side of caution. The entire list of patrons and beneficiaries is transcribed in the appendix. Again, Rosalie Calvert made many references to economic difficulties and hardships caused by the War of 1812 (Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale*, 217–75).

28. Rosalie Calvert wrote on several occasions about normally expecting a 5 or 6 percent rate of return on various kinds of investment. See for example, letters to Henri Jean Stier, August 2, 1810, March 20, 1815, in Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale*, 223, 279–80.

29. Proceedings, February 21, 1817, 603, PGCLC.

30. Real Property, 1800, 12; 1810, 12; Personal Property, 1800, 12; 1810, 11, PGCTA.

31. Real Property, 1800, 5; 1810, 5; Personal Property, 1800, 5; 1810, 5, PGCTA.

32. Real Property, 1800, 32; Personal Property, 1800, 38; Proceedings, January 4, 1812, 404, 414–15, PGCTA.

33. Kitty Gray may have been Caty Gray who was identified as a free black person in the census of 1800. If not, there were numerous other Grays, all free African Americans, to whom Kitty Gray was probably related. Esther Churb was probably a relation of either or both of

George and Robert Churb, also identified as free blacks. See Population Schedules of the Second Census of the United States, 1800, Prince George's County, Maryland, 446 (Benjamin and Peter Gray), 456 (Richard, Thomas, and Millie Gray), 457 (George and Robert Churb), 477 (Mary Gray), 478 (Caty Gray).

34. Real Property, 1800, 25; 1810, 23; Personal Property, 1800, 28; 1810, 25, PGCTA.

35. Personal Property, 1810, 2, PGCTA.

# Caught in the Machinery: The Cultural Meanings of Workplace Accidents in Victorian Britain and the United States

JAMIE BRONSTEIN

Between 1830 and 1880, workers in Britain and the United States faced a rising toll of accidents in the workplace. While the risk to life and limb had always been, and would continue to be, present in homes and on farms, work in increasingly mechanized places—mines, railroads, and factories—created new hazards. Blocked by common law precedent from successfully suing their employers for compensation for their injuries, workers had no recourse but to suffer hardships, unless these were ameliorated through employer or public charity, worker mutual assistance, or personal savings.<sup>1</sup> As newspapers became a mass medium, they helped bring before the public eye the rising human toll of workplace accidents, the steps governments took to prevent them, and the ways in which workers and courts sought to redress them or hindered their redress.

Examination of newspaper reports shows not only that workplace accidents received much press coverage, but also that they were discussed in routine, melodramatic ways that focused on the emotional toll and cast workers as hapless victims of circumstance or Providence. An alternative newspaper treatment presented workplace accidents as opportunities for workers to demonstrate heroism. Neither approach considered that workplaces might be made safer or suggested who should bear the cost of accidents. In contrast, workers' memoirs and testimony before Parliamentary committees reveal that workers had different priorities than those offered by the press; that, at least on the level of public expression, the financial impact of accidents had greater weight than their emotional toll.

## A Melodramatic Age

At a time when melodrama was an extremely popular genre of fiction, newspapers intended for mass audiences often presented occupational accidents in melodramatic and pathetic terms. Except for those few newspapers like the *British Miner and General Newsman*, that were devoted solely to workers' issues, reports of accidents were most often interspersed with news of murders, seductions, and other unusual occurrences. Reporters played to readers' sensibilities by emphasizing such elements as the extreme youth, female gender, or inexperience of workers

*Dr. Bronstein is Associate Professor of History at New Mexico State University.*

who had been killed or wounded, the number and condition of dependents, and the workers' last words.

The grief of surviving relatives was both omnipresent in the narrative and central to its interpretation. John Walker, for example, was killed at the Gloucester Point Mills when he stooped to pick up something and "became entangled in the machinery, and his face and head were dreadfully crushed. He was carried home by his widowed mother, Mrs. Walker, wrapped up in a piece of bagging which they had hastily gathered up, covered with blood, just as she was getting his supper. . . . The unrestrained piercing and agonized cries of the widow and her children made quite a harrowing spectacle."<sup>2</sup>

Although women appeared in newspaper accident stories as both workers and as relatives of workers, they were most strongly delineated, at least in the middle-class press, as widows or as grieving mothers or daughters.<sup>3</sup> The behavior of the female relatives of accident victims was described so often in the pre-1860 period that certain clichés developed. Newspaper reports described widows throwing themselves upon coffins, weeping, shrieking, and rending their hair and garments in language that is considerably more colorful and less terse than the style used to describe the accidents themselves.<sup>4</sup> The *Harrisburg Republican* described the aftermath of a gunpowder explosion:

Here was a wretched mother distractedly carrying and dragging her orphan children while she was searching for the shattered corpse of their father. There sat another weeping; one who having found the blackened remains of a man was gazing upon it with wild anxiety uncertain whether indeed it was the beloved being who but a few hours before had pillowed his head upon her now aching bosom. A little further with clasped hands and streaming eyes was seen a young woman who had just found the body of her father and with loud cries was lamenting his untimely death.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the Greensburg, Pennsylvania, *Intelligencer* reported that a Mr. McClung of New Salem was placing some props under the roof of the Methodist Meeting House when it fell in and killed him instantly. "His corpse was carried to his place of residence, and the scene exhibited on its arrival was heart-rending in the extreme. His wife went frantic with grief, and would have torn the coffin to pieces, had not she been restricted by friendly hands."<sup>6</sup> While men were described much more often as victims than as mourners, when they did appear as mourners their emotionality was notable, as expressions of grief were a feminine trait. Writing about the Avondale, Pennsylvania, mine fire and cave-in, Thomas Knox recalled that "many of the men were overcome with grief as they saw the remains of their comrades, and tears trickled down their cheeks from eyes unused to tears."

Children's reactions were perhaps the most devastating, since they were described as being too naive to even recognize the gravity of the situation. "Children too young to know their bereavement clung in mute astonishment to the sides of their weeping mothers, and shrank from the blackened corpses in which they were unable to recognize their fathers."<sup>7</sup>

Melodramatic storytelling prompted Victorian writers to convey moments of disaster as inexpressibly horrific. Many described the outcomes of workplace disasters as indescribable while simultaneously attempting to describe them, as did one correspondent at a colliery disaster:

The loud wailing of widows and the shrill cry of orphans so suddenly made; the passionate grief of mothers and the lamentations of brothers and sisters so unexpectedly bereaved; together with the deep and heart-sickening emotion of the spectators . . . combined to produce an impression which few can adequately conceive and which none, who did not witness it, can fully understand.<sup>8</sup>

Wemyss Reid, a correspondent for the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, commenting on a long funeral procession after the Hartley colliery cave-in, wrote that "It is impossible to describe the effect produced by this strange procession of death."<sup>9</sup> Grief and sadness were so overwhelming that anger was unthinkable.

When men were killed in workplace accidents, newspapers often reported whether they left behind widows and children, and if children, their number and their ages. Newspapers often commented on families having been left entirely destitute.<sup>10</sup> As one early report in the *London Times* noted, "A melancholy accident happened on Saturday last to Thomas Barefoot, one of the persons employed in the mill near Mill Pond Bridge, Rotherhithe, occasioned by the entangling of his clothes in the cogs of the mill, by which he was mangled in a shocking manner, his left thigh being torn off, and his body crushed to pieces. He has left a wife and one child to deplore his loss; and, what is still more shocking, she is now far advanced in pregnancy."<sup>11</sup> Robert Asher has argued that newspapers of the period emphasized the impact of industrial accidents on widows and children in order to explain the social cost of such accidents. Injured workers fell into the Victorian taxonomy of morals under the heading "worthy poor," and newspapers recognized this designation by calling the injured party "unfortunate," a sign of empathy.<sup>12</sup> Because they were rendered as individual stories of bad luck, these and countless other narratives of families destroyed failed to make the connection between repeated accidents and the need for increased safety, or more certain monetary compensation for the worker and his family.

In contrast with injuries to adult male workers, those suffered by women and youths were likely to be framed in terms of their social impact and thereby attract

legislative attention. In England, with a relatively high percentage of women in the paid workforce, the impact of work on their reproductive capacities was an early concern. Thus an English newspaper reported that at the Coalport China Works,

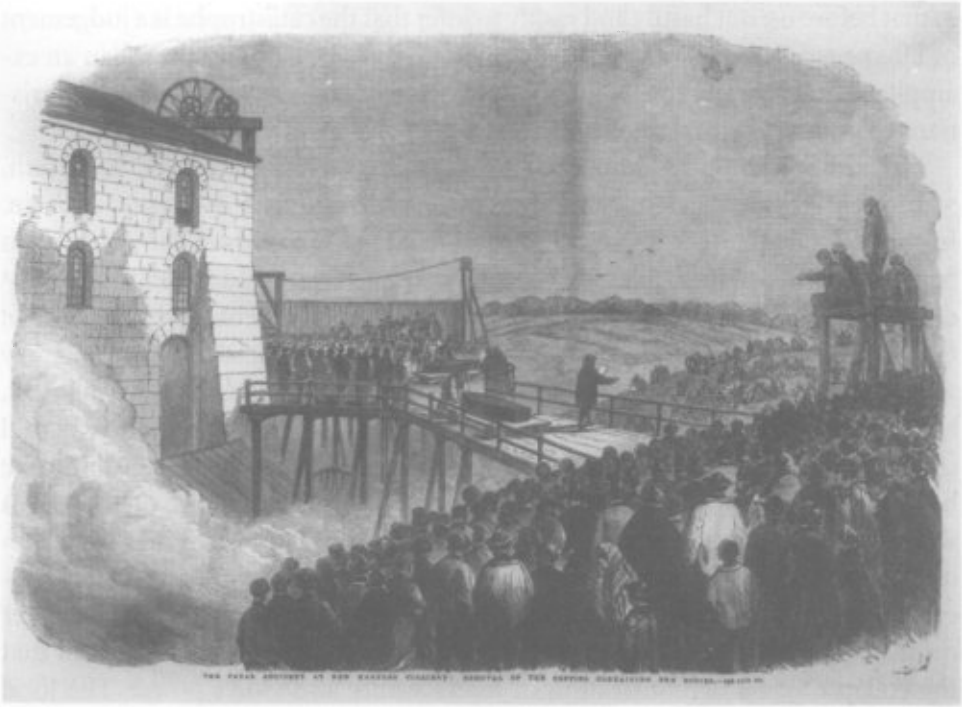
A poor woman, engaged in feeding a bone mill, had unfortunately approached so near the machinery as to get her clothes entangled in the wheels. The result was that she was drawn in between the teeth of a pair of rapidly-revolving wheels, and the flesh was literally pinched in large pieces by the remorseless machine from the thick part of her thighs. An additional shade of melancholy is given to the circumstance by the fact that she was *enceinte* at the time.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, testimony that women who worked as coal-movers (“hurriers”) in mines often miscarried was among the evidence that moved legislators to bar women and girls from underground mine work in 1842.<sup>14</sup>

The narratives of workplace accidents and their social devastation, which littered nineteenth-century narratives, enabled readers to exercise their Christian feeling toward the less fortunate without really thinking about inequalities of wealth distribution or unsafe work practices. After describing the impact of a gunpowder explosion, the *Harrisburg Republican* editorialized, “These were scenes which were calculated to make man feel for man and make him in agony of soul exclaim — ‘to what better, to what nobler, use can gold be applied than to bind up the broken heart, be a father to the fatherless and a friend to him who has none to help him?’” The families of workers injured or killed on the job relied heavily on public subscriptions to meet daily needs. Appeals such as these allowed a simple donation to the cause to serve as a catharsis, without raising larger questions of social responsibility. And attract donations they certainly did; hundreds of widows and children were relieved with public money collected in the wake of coal mine disasters.<sup>15</sup>

Popular accounts of workplace accidents distracted readers from issues of long-term change by channeling readers’ thoughts onto a religious plane. Sermons generated in the wake of serious workplace disasters impressed upon accident victims the need to accept a subservient and ignorant position in the face of divine forces beyond their control. In the wake of the collapse of the Felling colliery in 1812, in which ninety-two miners were killed, the cleric presiding over a mass funeral warned all to remember that “Christian resignation should guard us against all expressions of impatience and unthankfulness at the plans of Providence.” Following particularly bad disasters, days of prayer and fasting were proclaimed, and the community joined together to answer an angry Providence by expressing communal awe.<sup>16</sup> Non-clerics might allude to the will of Providence in a more formulaic way, an outgrowth of public Victorian religiosity rather than an expression of





Woodcut from the *Illustrated London News* depicting the Hartley colliery cave-in in 1862. Women wait to see whether their loved ones will be brought up from below. An empty coffin awaits an occupant.

heartfelt religious belief. A Delaware newspaper informed its readers of the loss of life following the 1847 gunpowder explosion at DuPont; almost all of the dead were from Ireland, and fourteen had left behind widows or families. "The ways of Providence are inscrutable . . . the wives and children of the deceased claim our warmest sympathy," the editor mused.<sup>17</sup> If the strange ways of God were responsible for mine cave-ins and gunpowder explosions, then the possibility that man might make inroads against such disasters was circumscribed.

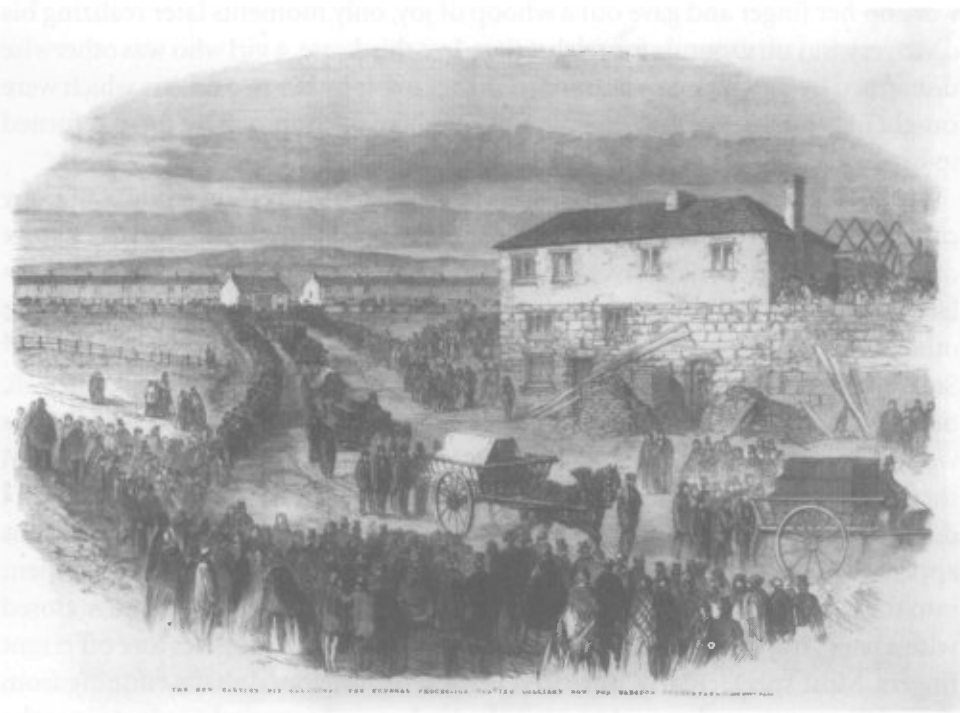
The cave-in of the Hartley colliery, which was in many ways a turning point in the quest for compensation for injured workers or the families of workers killed on the job, elicited a great deal of commentary on the relationship between disasters and God. The Religious Tract Society issued an account of the disaster that paid special attention to the fact that several of the dying men had held a prayer meeting underground and another had inscribed "Mercy, O God!" on his tin lunchbox before being asphyxiated. "The occurrence is one which speaks in the most solemn and forcible terms to all of us. It is a loud call upon us to consider the mysteriousness of God's providence. God's ways are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts. . . . It should be ours therefore not to question or cavil in such a case

as that before us; not hastily and rashly to infer that the catastrophe is a judgement of Divine wrath against the wisdom and Goodness of God." Rather than an example of God's wrath, the incident might be an object lesson for all good Christians to ponder their relationships with God.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to underlining the folly of attempting to predict life and death, sermons following accidents sometimes pointed to accidents as a reprisal for sin. In the wake of the Hartley disaster, Alexander Reid mused on the connection between the sins of the colliers as a community and their sudden decimation underground. "Your sins, dear reader, may be of a very different order from these; they may be carefully concealed from the view of those around you, and you may yourself be only partially aware of their enormity . . . but God knows them all, hates them all, and will judge you for them all."<sup>19</sup> After Samuel Hammond's mill collapsed in 1853, Reverend Charles Gutch of Leeds daringly blamed Hammond; his failure to remove a tyrannical overseer who had impregnated two of his women workers had brought the wrath of God upon him.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, when the Pemberton mill collapsed and caught fire in 1860, killing hundreds of immigrant Irish workers, every clergyman in the town of Lawrence, Massachusetts, tried to find a higher moral, rather than a scientific, explanation. The Congregationalist opined that the collapse was a demonstration of men's vanity and God's power. The local Baptist minister pointed his finger at the love of money. Others noted that the Irish workers had been licentious and violated the Sabbath. All the clergymen took the collapse as a lesson that men were required to place God above worldly things.<sup>21</sup>

Working people may have been objectified in these narratives, but they were not powerless; they used the middle-class sympathy industry to their own advantage. Sermons given in the wake of industrial accidents might be printed and sold for the benefit of the affected families. Poems and ballads in memory of the dead were printed on heavy card stock or even on fringed cloth and sold in order to swell relief funds.<sup>22</sup> One such poem, printed after the Crystal Palace collapsed, beseeched God and the public on behalf of the deceased construction workers and their families:

*Oh God! Dry up the widow's tears  
And ease the orphan's grief  
Look with compassion down on them  
And send to them relief;  
Be a father to the orphan child  
A husband to the wife  
And be a kind protector  
Unto them during life.*<sup>23</sup>



*The residents of Earsdon watch the funeral procession to the Earsdon churchyard after the Hartley colliery cave-in. (London Illustrated News, 1862.)*

While the majority of accident narratives were written to elicit pity, others employed irony and coincidence revolving around men's misguided attempts to outguess Providence. When Mrs. Robert Green of Barnsley buried her husband, who was killed by a fall of coal, the newspaper made sure to report that her first husband had died in the same manner. Two sand-pit workers were killed in a cave-in; ironically, one of the workers had quit his job at the DuPont gunpowder works expressly because he wanted to avoid danger. The *Blue Hen's Chicken* found it "singular" that "Two men have recently moved from the powder mills, in the neighborhood of Wilmington, on account of the danger, and both have met their death from other causes, viz; poor McCoy, who moved from Gareschee's and was almost immediately afterwards killed by the blowing up of the boiler of the paper mill; and James Green, who lately moved from Dupont's. . . . The ways of Providence are strange."<sup>24</sup>

The pamphleteers who described the Pemberton Mill collapse recounted several incidents of irony in their narrative. One man, trapped in rubble, attempted to commit suicide in the face of a fiery death, only to be rescued before being consumed by flames. Another man recognized his wife's dead body by the ring she

wore on her finger and gave out a whoop of joy, only moments later realizing his discovery was no grounds for celebration. In a third case, a girl who was otherwise unharmed by the collapse was trapped in the rubble by her two fingers which were caught in the machinery. In despair, she tore them off, only to have them returned to her by the disaster cleanup crew two days later.<sup>25</sup>

While melodrama, pathos, religious sensibility, and a certain amount of irony can all be related to Victorian piety, it is at first less easy to explain the gory nature of Victorian accident narratives. Throughout the nineteenth century, but particularly before the Civil War, newspaper accounts of workplace accidents—as well as other kinds of disasters—described depredations on the body in loving detail.<sup>26</sup> Steam-driven machinery and other technological advancements were, after all, new, and their impact on humans unprecedented.<sup>27</sup> The one case in which male workers' and female workers' fates on the job were described similarly was when they were injured or killed by machinery, largely because the machines didn't discriminate on the basis of sex.<sup>28</sup> Machines in particular seemed to have voracious appetites for limbs, as unguarded drive belts caught workers and dragged them into the whirling gears.<sup>29</sup> Self-acting mule-spinners, machines to spin yarn, closed with a bang, trapping and crushing children's heads. Machine gears tore off errant fingers. Most spectacularly, unfenced vertical or horizontal shafts running from the motive power to the machinery sucked in hair or loose clothing and, once the belts running from these shafts had a victim in their grasp, beat him or her mercilessly against ceilings or crushed them between drums. Nor were machine-related accidents limited to factories. A Reading, Pennsylvania, newspaper reported that a nameless "12-year-old daughter of William Saltzer" was killed when she was caught in a threshing machine. She stepped over a connecting rod, her dress was caught on a nail, and her body was wound around the rod, crushing her to death instantly. "Her neck was fractured and the whole body dreadfully lacerated and mangled."<sup>30</sup>

Some accidents produced results verging on the fantastic or the gothic. A Pennsylvania newspaper noted that during an explosion, one of two men killed was literally blown out of his slippers, which were afterward found in the place where the man had been standing. When an exploding boiler in a carpet factory flew through several buildings and across the River Wear, rescuers carried away three women. Their "clothes were torn and wet, their hair dishevelled, the scalded and blackened skin lay rough on their arms, necks and shoulders, and their features were scarcely distinguishable among bruises and blood."<sup>31</sup> The *British Miner and General Newsman*, usually reserved in its description, noted of one accident near Wolverhampton that a skip fell down a shaft "with such terrible violence that four of the five [workers] were mutilated corpses instantaneously upon the concussion, and the sides of the shaft were disfigured with sickening evidence of the terrible reality." In the wake of a gunpowder explosion in Northern New Jersey,

searchers with sharp sticks walked about in the woods looking for human remains, spearing "a morsel of flesh here and a bone there." According to the newspaper, they collected enough bits of human bones and strips of scorched and tattered flesh to fill two bushel baskets.<sup>32</sup>

In an era without newspaper photographs, such literal description was titillating and sold newspapers. The editor of the *American Watchman* acknowledged as much when describing the 1818 gunpowder explosion at DuPont. The paper, he wrote, was "endeavouring to avoid the Editorial sin of spinning out horrible descriptions and wracking the nerves of others for the sake of selfish profit or amusement of the idle."<sup>33</sup> Gory descriptions also reinforced the lesson that humans were fragile in spite of their pride, and that life was easily extinguished. This conclusion might be a springboard either for fatalism or for the laying of blame. In the case of the exploding boiler described above, the editor of the *Newcastle Courant* grimly concluded that such accidents were becoming more frequent and serious. He chided employers, claiming that they were responsible not only for valuable property but also for the human lives in their care. The editor of the *British Miner and General Newsman* hoped the gory nature of such accidents might actually compel some action on the part of mine owners:

What if some of the horrifying remnants of the many explosions were placed before the next meeting of the coal trade, stern in all their ghastly hideousness — some without limbs, some with faces which were once as joyous as their own, but upon which a smile could never show itself again, because that every feature had been blown or battered into one; some with sockets where the eyes had been, but with no eyes remaining. Such an array of horrors would surely induce the mine owners of this country to consider more anxiously the safety of those by whom their wealth is produced.<sup>34</sup>

### Wartime Imagery

Nineteenth-century reporters often compared the human toll of industrialization to that of war.<sup>35</sup> Thomas Tancred, author of the first report to Parliament by the Midland Mining Commission, noted in passing that "there is a regular system of relief for men wounded or killed *in the service* (for no other than military terms are appropriate to the subject)." *The Lancet*, England's premier medical journal, commented on the casualties wreaked by the Hartley colliery cave-in. "Such a loss of life, from any sudden accident in Great Britain, has not taken place since the rebellion of 1745. We can only compare it to a battle-field after an engagement."<sup>36</sup>

Anthony Bale interprets such language through a Marxist framework, claim-

ing that limping workers or industrial amputees came to symbolize oppressive capitalist labor relations, and to embody the abuse of power.<sup>37</sup> Although cynicism reached America with the vast carnage of the Civil War, in Britain wartime images were generally considered heroic and tragic at least until the First World War. In the heroic narrative of nineteenth-century industrialization, injured workers were perceived as participants in, rather than innocent victims of, battle—a comparison enhanced, for example, when the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England proposed that all collieries and other large employers train ambulance crews. They were advised to keep on hand such wartime medical supplies as “Moffit’s Battlefield Splints,” an “army hospital attendants’ dressing case,” and the two-wheeled Neuss hand-litter then in use by the Prussian army.<sup>38</sup>

Workers themselves celebrated acts of heroism in the wake of mine disasters in both patriotic and nationalistic terms. Fred Albert wrote a song which was sold as a keepsake to benefit the national Colliery Fund and later won a prize at the Welsh National Eisteddfodd in 1867:

*I'll sing a song of suffering and bravery combined  
The like of which no parallel in history we find.  
Of the men who were imprisoned in the pit at Pontypridd  
And their truly gallant comrades who their work so nobly did.*

Albert described the miners working underground in dreadful darkness, minding their own business, when all of a sudden water rushed in and they were trapped. All was not lost, however. “Though it was thought that death was nigh — pluck and skill prevails; Bravely they were rescued by their comrades down in Wales.” Five men were trapped underground, with nothing to eat but candle grease. If ever men stood upon the brink of death, it was these five; but just when the water was up to their waists, they were saved by the courage of the Welsh. “All honor to the Welshmen, the saviors and the saved; another mark of honor on our banner they have graved. . . . and children yet unborn shall live to hear the glorious tales, of the rescuers and the rescued from the colliery in Wales.”<sup>39</sup>

The heroism shown by rescuers in these situations was described as transcending class, although occasionally the rhetoric used to congratulate workers on their heroism ended up emphasizing class distinctions. After the Hartley disaster, the *Illustrated London News* praised “manifestations of self-sacrificing courage, of magnanimous oblivion of self, of cool presence of mind in view of appalling dangers, of readiness to do and to dare anything for the sake of saving life,” which had been observed around the blocked coal-shaft. At the same time, its correspondent noted that “these efforts, continued over a period of many days, have made us proud of our countrymen, and have disclosed to us a rich vein of character imbedded beneath the uncomely exterior of a rude and uncultivated class which ought

to raise them in the estimation of the public and bespeak for them its warmest sympathy."<sup>40</sup>

Rude and uncultivated as they might have been, industrial rescuers were rewarded like wartime heroes. In the wake of the Hartley colliery disaster, a Presentation Committee funded and oversaw the production of handsome gold medals to reward the rescuers.<sup>41</sup> The reverse side of each medal shows, in a style approaching socialist realism, bare-chested rescuers shoveling debris from the sprawled bodies of the dead as Mercury looks on. The Order of St. John publicly awarded its own Order of Merit, along with other incentives, to Frederick Vickers and Elijah Hallam, who rescued survivors at the Albert Colliery in 1875. As he presented the two men with their medals, Sir Edmund Lechmere, secretary of the order, noted that, as in wartime, heroism in the aftermath of workplace accidents transcended class. "True chivalry may exist in every class and condition of men; its impulses may beat in every breast, whether that breast be covered by the broadcloth of the gentleman or by the working dress of the collier."<sup>42</sup>

Sadly, as in wartime, industrial accidents left in their wake unknown and unmarked dead. After the Pembroke Mill collapse, nine bodies and parts of the remains of others were buried in two boxes in the Lawrence cemetery—the unknown soldiers of the industrial war, a war that knew no rules of just combat.<sup>43</sup> Just as every English town would sport its own First World War memorial to testify to unprecedented carnage, so the churchyard at Earsdon even today features an obelisk dedicated to the men and boys who died in the Hartley colliery cave-in in 1862.

That individual onlookers' responses to accidents might be shaped by these various narrative tropes is clear. William P. Brobson, a Wilmington lawyer, businessman, politician, editor, and Quaker, felt impelled after a small gunpowder explosion at the DuPont factory in 1825 to reminisce in his diary about the larger and more deadly explosions of 1818. The explosion itself was an example of the man-made sublime: "Two dreadful explosions in quick succession followed by a third after an interval of a few minutes, attracted all eyes towards the DuPonts, where the smoke was seen ascending in high, fleecy columns, which would have been admired as a beautiful spectacle, but for the unhappy forebodings they awakened."

Once on the scene, Brobson, like the newspapers, noted a horror "almost beyond description" but which he did not hesitate to describe. "About forty persons were destroyed, whose mangled remains in every form of mutilation, were spread over the ground." Had he been a newspaper reporter, Brobson might have stopped there, but in the privacy of his diary he was free to strike an ambivalent note: disgust at the industry from which the DuPonts profited mixed with admiration for the stoicism of workmen and owners alike. Only personal heroism could explain why men would subject themselves to such risk. "They are fortunate who can fix themselves in this kind of insensibility, which probably constitutes, in the great mass of mankind what is called courage or bravery."<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, like many of those who delivered sermons on workplace accidents, Thomas Hodgkin, an observer at the scene of the Hartley disaster, was moved to think about religion by observing the men's widows. "Everywhere, as far as I have heard, there seems to be that meek resignation to God's will, the bowed head and lips dumb before the Lord by which the poor, or at any rate the women of the poor, so often shame us."<sup>45</sup> Like so many press writers, Hodgkin was an outsider to the Hartley community, so one naturally wonders how much Christian resignation and silence he would have encountered had he been invited inside a miner's cottage.

It is clear that narrative conventions molded the public image of workplace accidents and disasters, but not all had an effect on the way in which workers themselves interpreted the accidents that befell them. Some workers were touched by the evangelical religion of their time, and for Christians of any social class an accident was an opportunity to rethink one's relationship with God and to prepare for the inevitable.<sup>46</sup> Some mine accidents in particular encouraged such thought, resembling as they did the "rapture" of Christian pre-millennial evangelicalism, taking one workman and sparing the man next to him. John Buddle, a mine "viewer," testified with wonder about how a miner had brought his son to work one day, for his first day of work as a trapper boy. The boy was visiting him when an explosion occurred. The man had the boy by the hand, but as the man was standing in a little niche, the force of the explosion grabbed his son's body and propelled it up the shaft and out, while sparing the father.<sup>47</sup>

Anecdotal evidence suggests that for workers as well as their observers and social betters, religion and work accidents were intertwined. One late nineteenth-century story about miners, published in a working-class newspaper, ends not with the expected rescue, but rather with last-minute conversion and supplication to God. For Victorian readers, rescue from imminent death might not constitute the only possible happy ending.<sup>48</sup> Hardened working people also took consolation from knowing a family member had at least died well in a work accident. Patrick Vance inquired about his son, dead in a gunpowder explosion; "The only grief that strikes us at present is to think he was either blown up, or taken away in a moment, perhaps without time to pray to God for to have mercy on his soul . . . let me know everything respecting his death."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the widows of the men killed in the Hartley colliery cave-in possibly found some comfort from the inscription that one of their husbands inscribed in a little notebook found on his body. It indicated that as the air ran out among them, the men sang hymns and one of them repeatedly exhorted the rest to Christian belief. Miner Thomas Watson became a popular speaker in the Newcastle area after being one of the only men spared in the Hartley catastrophe, a fact which precipitated his religious conversion.<sup>50</sup>



## Financial Pressures

Although religious considerations certainly mattered, most nineteenth-century workers who left any record of their feelings about workplace accidents expressed concern about their financial impact. Workers who had been injured or seen friends injured on the job often spoke or wrote of the length of time they were unable to work. This is not surprising, since so many workers relied on mutual benefit clubs for their subsistence when injured, and the inability to work was the definition of injury or sickness in many of the clubs' rules. Workers also commented on whether or not their employers paid for their medical expenses.<sup>51</sup>

One anonymous miner who began working underground in 1853 at age eight, remembered the trauma of an accident in which his younger brother had broken a leg.

I got him out of the pit and they put him into a coal cart, and we set off on a journey of six or seven miles on a road some places being very good, but mostly very bad. You can imagine the plight of my poor brother, as he was being jostled about for such a long distance and with a broken leg, being the 11th day of March and the pitiless rain beating down on us all the way.

His memory of the pain, however, was inextricable from the accident's financial consequences. After traveling a distance of four or five miles, they were intercepted by a doctor. "It would be deemed inhuman today to allow anyone to travel such a distance with a broken leg without being attended to. But such was the case of my brother even though the colliery proprietor was extremely wealthy . . . the doctor set the leg and he was off work about 20 weeks. This was a serious loss to us as my father had to pay another lad to hurry for him." The same miner noted that after another accident, a roof fall, the miners' tools were all buried under the rubble and they were told they would have to pay for new ones.<sup>52</sup> A correspondent to the *Miner and Workman's Advocate* reported that he knew a man who had worked at the Littleshall Colliery for twenty-two years, paying four pence every two weeks for medical care, and that he had been burned so badly at work that his arm was tucked and could not be lifted as high as his shoulder, making him unfit for pit work. After two years, the company stopped paying him field-pay and said that now it was the parish's job to provide for him. Even for the twentieth-century miner, the struggle to wrest compensation from sometimes unscrupulous employers, and the contrasting willingness of the community of miners to pitch in after an accident, were central to the experience and interpretation of workplace accidents.<sup>53</sup>

Miners on strike in 1844 cited lack of compensation for workplace accidents as a major grievance and lobbied for the institution of "smart money"—wages due as a matter of right from the mine owner to any miner injured on the job.<sup>54</sup> At one

meeting in the Tyneside area, Thomas Cleugh, of Thornley, described being overcome by gas in the mine where he worked. "On his recovering, however, he had to go back again, and the consequence was, that he was laid up for fifteen weeks. He then applied for smart money but could obtain none, because it was not in the bond [collective labor contract]; and he therefore thought it hard, that while a man received smart money when his arm or leg was broken, he could not be remunerated when his constitution was impaired by poisonous air."<sup>55</sup> The striking workers also sought a guarantee of sufficient medical attendance and medicine, and that in the event of a miner's death, free house rent, fuel, and £2 for funeral expenses would be granted to the widow.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the personal and financial risks, nineteenth-century workers were willing to work in unsafe industries if they could command a higher rate of pay for their trouble. After one major gunpowder explosion at DuPont's works, Alfred DuPont received letters from workmen who offered their services, on the condition that they be recompensed through high wages for the danger they were about to encounter.<sup>57</sup> While DuPont personnel records appear to show that fourteen powdermen left the yards in the wake of the gunpowder explosion of 1818, this was the exception rather than the rule.<sup>58</sup> DuPont was a paternalist, who took care of the widows and children created by accidents at his plant.<sup>59</sup> After an 1847 explosion, DuPont told one of his business contacts that "very few of our hands have left, for out of so many it was out of the question that all should be possessed of the moral courage required to bear up against the sight of friends torn to pieces without a moment's warning; but taken as a whole our people are behaving nobly." DuPont noted that he was able to ameliorate workers' fear of gunpowder work by making sure that he or another member of the family was present "at each and every spot where danger can be anticipated."<sup>60</sup> After another explosion, DuPont estimated that he only needed about a day to restore confidence in his worried workforce.<sup>61</sup>

Although workers in English coal pits faced an even greater risk than those who toiled in DuPont's gunpowder works, they expressed little fear in front of the middle-class observers who interviewed them from time to time regarding their working conditions. This fear did not stem from unfamiliarity with the danger inherent in mines—there could hardly have been a soul in the colliery villages of Durham and Northumberland, or in all of South Wales, who had not lost some family member in the pit. Rather, it stemmed from a stoicism born of financial need. Even pit widows were often able to survive only by putting their young children to pit work, and thus the cycle repeated itself. As colliery viewer Nicholas Wood testified before a Parliamentary Select Committee, there was no difficulty engaging workmen to fill the place of others who had died in an exploded mine.<sup>62</sup>

Colliers' views of safety and their workplace were complex. Those who had worked in pits from childhood were confident in their collective abilities to judge

and avoid dangerous situations. It was, for example, the practice of the pitmen, when there was any doubt about the safety of the mine, to "call a view," that is, to call in a disinterested viewer to check it out. But once underground, even experienced colliers sometimes found themselves pressured to choose between avoiding danger and being fired.<sup>63</sup> The latter possibility was quite real: statutes governing collieries, for example, prevented workers from leaving their places underground when they sensed danger. Miners therefore compensated in whatever ways they could. In South Staffordshire, miners themselves kept on hand supplies for the surgeon who might treat them.<sup>64</sup> Nor were miners beyond calling in a little supernatural assistance. According to one mine owner, the men in his pit considered that God had rewarded them with a good safety record because they met and prayed every day during their lunch break.<sup>65</sup> Neither emotionally disabled by fear, nor able to put the possibility out of their minds, workers faced their jobs with a kind of fatalism. As the United Pitmen stated in 1825, "To no set of men do the beautiful words of our burial service apply with more force and propriety than to the pitmen; 'in the midst of life we are in death.'"<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, workers' concern with the financial impact of accidents and dangerous work marked one way in which they diverged from the public discussion of accidents. Another was that in recounting their injuries to parliamentary investigators workers rarely gave any account of the pain they had suffered. What might account for their failure to leave accounts of their pain with the bureaucrats who documented their work lives? It is possible that, for working people who lived with higher levels of physical discomfort in their daily lives, their definition of pain was different from that of middle-class observers.<sup>67</sup> Many of them suffered cold and hunger on a daily basis, and children might experience physical punishment at home, work, and school. Everyday work inflicted pain, whether from undermining coal while kneeling or lying down, or from standing twelve hours a day in a deafening cotton factory. Furthermore, when workers received no formal education (as was true at least of colliers), limited vocabularies posed another obstacle—workers lacked the words to discuss their pain.<sup>68</sup>

Parliamentary commissioners who interviewed working people collected evidence that suggests a remarkable degree of emotional detachment from workplace deaths of family or friends.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that working people just became inured to accidents, but it is not likely. First, it is not clear that the interviewees perceived parliamentary interviews as the proper forum for expressing emotion or volunteering opinions. They were asked factual questions and seem to have provided factual answers accordingly (although this could also have been the way in which interviewers recorded the answers). Second, working people knew their interlocutors as outsiders both to their community and their class, and workers' emotional lives were none of their business. Finally, workers not knowing the uses to which their testimonies might be put may have feared reprisals from their employers.

Nevertheless, to state that workers placed a greater premium on the financial consequences of accidents than did middle-class observers is not to deny that they experienced emotional trauma. Workers occasionally mentioned their feelings, sometimes in the context of occurrences so horrible that it would be impossible for anyone not to be traumatized. John Atkinson, a coal hewer, lost an eleven-year-old son in a mine explosion and noted: "He was torn limb from limb by the explosion, and different parts of the body were sent to me at different times. I buried him with his body and one leg; another was sent to me next day, and some parts of him were buried that I never saw. The masters treated me with much kindness, and endeavoured to spare my feelings as much as possible."<sup>70</sup>

Workers' emotions should also be read in their actions. Colliers made strenuous efforts, often risking their own lives, in aid of their comrades, a testament to strong bonds of friendship and family.<sup>71</sup> One father, who worked in a lead mine, described how his twelve-year-old son, "a very fine and strong boy of his age," who had only been in the mine five weeks, sustained a leg and collar-bone fracture. "When I was told what had happened, I travelled as fast as I could to the place; and I seemed to see, every few fathoms as I went, the body of my poor boy all crushed together; it was so clear that I stopped and rubbed my eyes, and asked myself whether I was in my right mind or no." When he got there, he was relieved to find his son sitting up and only crying a little.<sup>72</sup> Workers remembered accidents that had occurred many years earlier, suggesting that they were haunted by the details:

About four years ago at the Elvet pit, when two men were going down, a hook of another rope caught him by the thigh, and ripped off the skin like a stocking. He got down to the foot of the shaft and then they drew him back up again, in the same condition as when he went down, and then they sent for the surgeon. The surgeon came to his house and sewed up the leg, but it all became dead flesh, and the man died five or six months after.<sup>73</sup>

Families of the injured refused to give up hope after workplace disasters, often carrying out exhausting vigils over coalpits. Joe Kenyon described their agony: "One of the unbearable things about a pit disaster is the intensity of the waiting; more dread than patience — lest the question asked should bring an answer that snuffs out that last flicker of hope."<sup>74</sup>

Whether or not it is evidence of the distrust between working people and the observers who wrote about them, the fact that workers invested greater importance in the economic rather than the emotional, or even in some cases the physical consequences of accidents, is only logical. Workplace injury lasted as long as it kept one from returning to the same or a similar job at the same rate of pay. When one returned to the job, the trauma surely remained, but the potentially deadly

economic aspect of the episode ended. The loss of a finger did not create a permanent sense of outrage; an intact body in the long run was of no use if in the short run one's family starved. Having a work-related handicap was simply a badge of the times. English coal pits were full of the limping wounded, factories were filled with workers missing parts of their fingers, and most railway companies had watchmen who had lost limbs as brakemen.<sup>75</sup>

The evidence shows that the image of workplace accidents in the middle-class press in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States was strongly shaped by literary conventions that cast the worker as innocent victim of circumstances, of Providence, or of the industrial battle zone. Workplace accidents became opportunities to celebrate heroism or exercise Christian kindness rather than appearing to be lasting tragedies. These narratives were shaped by the religious beliefs and expectations of the newspaper-reading public more than they reflected workers' lives on the job. The physical and emotional consequences of work accidents were described in loving detail, while the economic consequences were more briefly hinted at. In contrast, workers' behavior and their memoirs both suggest that, while there were emotional and religious ramifications of accidents, the economic consequences were foremost in their minds. Unlike the reading public, injured workers and their families literally could not afford to be sentimental.

This gulf between workers and those who chronicled and described them not only further estranged classes already far apart, but it also had another impact. When Britain finally did set a precedent within the Anglo-American legal structure by passing an Employers' Liability Act in 1880, it was as a result of intensive lobbying by workers rather than a response to philanthropic impulses encouraged by shocking and distressing press reports. For more than forty years, newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic had recounted the grisly toll of workplace accidents without achieving this goal. Melodramatic or heroic narratives of workplace accidents might lead to the passage of safety legislation for working women and children, as happened in Britain. They also might encourage juries to sympathize with injured workers, as happened in the United States in those rare cases in which an injury resulted in a jury trial. Nonetheless, neither of these changes reached the heart of the matter. Workers in both countries had been expressing themselves on the personal financial cost of workplace accidents for several decades, but not until they were organized enough to put pressure through their parliamentary representatives would the government in either Great Britain or the United States listen to them.

## NOTES

1. The best general work on workplace accidents and their compensation on the English side at this time is P. W. J. Bartrip and S. B. Burman, *The Wounded Soldiers of Industry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). There is no comparable study for the United States.
2. *Blue Hen's Chicken*, September 17, 1847.
3. Robert Asher noted that in American newspapers, the widow and children of a deceased worker often eclipsed the worker and his case. Robert Asher, "Workmen's Compensation in the United States, 1880-1935" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1971), 55.
4. See, for example, *The Explosion of Felling Colliery, by which Ninety-Two Persons Lost their Lives, On the 25th of May, 1812* (Dublin: C. Bentham, n.d.).
5. *Harrisburg Republican*, March 27, 1818.
6. The Greensburg paper is excerpted in the *Miners' Journal and Pottsville General Advertiser*, November 25, 1843.
7. Thomas Knox, *Underground: Or, Life Below the Surface* (Hartford: J.B. Bin, 1875), 586.
8. Benjamin Beddow, *A Call to Consideration in Prospect of Eternity* (Barnsley: John Elliott, 1847), 14.
9. John Elliott McCutcheon, *The Hartley Colliery Disaster, 1862* (Seaham: E. McCutcheon, 1963), 103. Perhaps the worst workplace disaster in nineteenth-century British history, the Hartley disaster occurred when the beam of the pumping engine broke off and fell into the Hartley single-shaft mine, carrying debris into the mine and trapping over two hundred men and boys underground. Despite a long rescue effort that received updated news coverage throughout the country, all the men who were underground at the time died slowly of asphyxiation. The disaster prompted Parliament to compel mine owners to open second shafts where none had previously existed.
10. *Blue Hen's Chicken*, February 2, 1849: "We learn that Edmund Wollaston, brother of Joseph Wollaston of this city, who resides near Unionville, Chester County, was accidentally caught in the machinery of his Grist Mill, on Tuesday last, and instantly killed," leaving a wife and six or seven children. See also the *Miners' Journal and Pottsville General Advertiser*, May 10, June 28, and July 19, 1845. It is not safe to assume that a report that a man's death had left a family destitute would have been understood the same way by all readers. Some may have seen the report as a call for legal or social change, to put the worker on a better footing; others, as a personal call for charitable action toward the family; still others as a criticism of a lack of foresight on the part of the worker who had been killed.
11. *Times*, August 19, 1795.
12. Asher, "Workmen's Compensation," 50-51, 55.
13. Museum Display, Coalport China Museum, Ironbridge Gorge, England.
14. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Commission for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories, First Report (Mines) 1842* (380), 15:30.
15. *Harrisburg Republican*, March 27, 1818, quoted in S. Fulton and R. Scott, "Interpretive Packet on Explosions" (Wilmington, Del.: Hagley Museum and Library, 1990), 37. Substantial public subscriptions were raised to support the widows and orphans made by the 1818 explosion. See Memorial from Widows and Orphans, accession no. 146 File 48, Folder 17, Eleuthera Bradford DuPont collection, Hagley Museum. *Parliamentary Papers, Accounts and Papers, Return of Colliery Accident Funds in Great Britain raised by Public Subscription, 1893-94* (359), 73:493.

16. John Hodgson, *The Funeral Sermon of the Felling Colliery Sufferers* (Newcastle: Edward Walker, 1815), 70; S. W. Mason and E. B. Haskell, comps., *An Authentic History of the Lawrence Calamity* (Boston: John J. Dyer, 1860), 52.
17. "Local Intelligence," undated news clipping, in Winterthur MSS, Group 10, Series D, Box 15 (Residual Material), Hagley Library.
18. *The Hartley Coal Pit* (The Religious Tract Society: London, n.d.), 8–9.
19. Alexander Reid, *A Voice from Hartley: Or, the Recent Catastrophe Described and Improved* (Newcastle: Home Piety Office, 1862), 10.
20. Rev. Charles Gutch, *The Sure Judgement of God Upon all Sinners, Especially the Rich, for their Neglect of the Poor* (London: F and J. Rivington, n.d.), 42.
21. Excerpts from the sermons are reprinted in *An Authentic History of the Lawrence Calamity*, 42–50.
22. *The Lamentation of twenty-five poor colliers who were stopped up in a coal-pit four days and four nights, fifteen of whom lost their lives, and ten were brought up alive, at the Haussees Colliery, Shropshire, February 29, 1819* (Birmingham: T. Bloomer, 1819); T. Papworth, *An Appeal for Aid to the Fellow-Workmen of W. Wood and A. Leonox, who have been Incapacitated by Accident* (n.p., n.d.); William Sanders, *Pontypridd Colliery Disaster* (n.p., April 11, 1877); J. Robson, *Hartley Sacrifice* (Sunderland: R. H. Coleman, n.d.). See also the songs reprinted in Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973).
23. *Full Particulars of the Dreadful Accident with the Loss of Twelve Lives at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham* (London: E. Hodges, 1853). See also Asher, "Workmen's Compensation," 57.
24. *British Miner and General Newsman*, September 20, 1862; *Blue Hen's Chicken*, February 4, 1848.
25. *An Authentic History of the Lawrence Calamity*, 17.
26. David P. Hendy, *Wreck of the Princess Alice* (London: Elliot Stock, n.d.); Walter Knight, *The Sunderland Disaster* (July 3, 1883) (n.p., n.d.); *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: Warren Lazell, 1846). Slightly more graphic is *Narrative of the Dreadful Accident which happened in the Parish Church of Kilmarnock, On Sunday the 18th October, 1801* (Glasgow: Niven, Napier and Rhull, 1802).
27. Arthur McEvoy, "Working Environments: An Ecological Approach to Industrial Health and Safety," *Technology and Culture*, 36 Supplement (1995): S145–72.
28. Workers' deaths by machinery are described in the *Times*, no. 5620, January 17, 1803; no. 7138, August 28, 1807; no. 8034, July 14, 1810; no. 8044, July 26, 1810; no. 9358, November 3, 1814; and no. 9895, July 24, 1816.
29. *Newcastle Courant*, March 7, 1835. See also Cawthon, "Apocrypha," 57; Elizabeth Cawthon, "Occupational Accidents and the Law: The Role of Coroners' Inquests in England, 1830–1850" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1985), 148; Mark Aldrich, *Safety First: Technology, Labor, and Business in the Building of American Work Safety 1870–1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 81.
30. *Miners' Journal and Pottsville General Advertiser*, January 24, 1846.
31. *Harrisburg Republican*, March 27, 1818, quoted in S. Fulton and R. Scott, "Interpretive Packet on Explosions," 34; *Newcastle Courant*, August 1, 1835.
32. *British Miner and General Newsman*, October 25, 1862; "Ten Victims of Dynamite: Only Small Bits of the Bodies Found," newspaper clipping, dated July 3, 1886, Longwood MSS Group 10, Papers of P. S. DuPont, File 418-1 to 418-3, Hagley Library.
33. *American Watchman*, March 24, 1818, in Acc 501, P. S. DuPont Office Collection, Series D, Business Papers, Notebooks 1–4, Hagley Library.
34. *British Miner and General Newsman*, new series no. 4, March 28, 1863. Thomas Lacqueur

has argued that the relationship of gory accident descriptions with calls for reform constituted a "humanitarian narrative" that moved society toward social change. See Thomas Lacqueur, "Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 176–204. When one looks at the timeline of social change, however, it appears that only certain accidents, like the Hartley disaster, weighed heavily enough on the public conscience to stimulate the outrage necessary for change.

35. Asher, "Workmen's Compensation," 59–60.

36. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Midland Mining Commission, First Report, 1843* (508), 13:li; *The Lancet*, March 1, 1862, 226.

37. Anthony Bale, "Compensation Crisis: The Value and Meaning of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses in the United States, 1842–1932" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1986), 39.

38. T. Longmore, "Observations on the Preliminary Care and Attention Necessary for Accidental Bodily Injuries and Mutilations Occurring in mines and Establishments where Many Workpeople are Employed," *Report of the Chapter of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1874), 18–22.

39. Fred Albert, *The Welsh Miners* (London: H. Pontin, n.d.).

40. *Illustrated London News*, February 1, 1862.

41. The medal is reproduced in the plates of McCutcheon, *The Hartley Colliery Disaster*.

42. Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England, *Descriptive History of Medals and Grants for Saving Life on Land by Special Acts of Bravery* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1876), 7–9.

43. *An Authentic History of the Lawrence Calamity*, 53.

44. George H. Gibson, "William P. Brobson Diary, 1825–1828," *Delaware History*, 15 (1972): 128–29.

45. Letter from Thomas Hodgkin, reprinted in T. E. Forster, ed. *Memoir of the Hartley Colliery Accident and Relief Fund* (Newcastle: Andrew Reid, 1912), 111.

46. Even the collapse of a church during a Sunday service could elicit this reaction. See *Authentic Account of the Dreadful Accident at Kirkcaldy* (n.p., n.d., 1828); A Spectator, *A Serious Address to the Inhabitants of Kirkcaldy and Vicinity* (Kirkcaldy: William Gemble, 1828).

47. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Report from the Select Committee on Accident in Mines, 1835* (603), 5:216.

48. Dick Browne, *Tom Downing, Miner: Tale of a Staffordshire Colliery Disaster* (Stoke-on-Trent: Vyve and Hill, 1896). See also, "The Author of 'Lilian's Talks with Mama about the Stars, Moon and Sun,'" in *Fuel for Our Fires: or Coal-Pits, Colliers, and Their Dangers* (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.). See also Asher, "Workmen's Compensation," 57.

49. Patrick Vance to Robert Miller, June 23, 1826, Lammot DuPont Papers, Series B. Technical Papers, Acc 384 Box 30, Hagley Library.

50. The miners' last message is reproduced in the plates of McCutcheon, *Hartley Colliery Disaster*. On Watson's conversion, see *The Hartley Catastrophe: Thomas Watson's Narrative* (Newcastle: D. H. Wilson, 1862).

51. See, for example, *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix I, 1842* (381), 16:495, 501, 511, 577, 602.

52. A Miner, "A Trade Union Solitary: A Mid-Nineteenth-Century Miner," *History Workshop*, 25 (1988): 152–54.

53. *Miner and Workman's Advocate*, December 26, 1863; Joe Kenyon, "Working Underground," *London Review of Books*, November 27, 1997, 19–21.



54. Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland, *A Voice from the Coal Mines, or a Plain Statement of the Various Grievances of the Pitmen of the Tyne and Wear* (South Shields: J. Clark, 1825), 28.
55. Clipping from unknown newspaper, dated May 11, 1844, in the Pitmen's Collection, D/DZ A31, item no. 55, Wigan Record Office, Leigh.
56. Proposed new bond, 1844, in the Pitmen's Collection, D/DZ A31, item no. 92, Wigan Record Office, Leigh.
57. Winterthur MSS Group 4 series D, E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., In File, W4-1702 to W41915, box 12, W4-2033, Winterthur MSS Group 4, series D, E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., In File, W4-1702 to W41915, box 12, W4-2035, Hagley Library.
58. Winterthur MSS Group 4 series 6 box 18, item no. 4988, small notebook listing powdermen working in yards, Hagley Library.
59. Dona McDermott, "E. I. DuPont De Nemours and Company: The Treatment of Widows Whose Husbands Were Killed in the Powder Mill Explosions, 1815–1880," unpublished research paper (n.d.) in possession of museum director, Hagley Museum, 5.
60. DuPont to Grant and Stone, April 16, 1847, Records of E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., accession no. 500, series I, part II, no. 798, Outbooks, E. I. DuPont & Co., 1846–47, 446, Hagley Library.
61. Letter to William Kemble, July 25, 1844, Records of E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., accession no. 500, series I, part B, no. 795, Out-Books, Outbooks, E. I. DuPont & Co., 1844, 56, Hagley Library.
62. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Midland Mining Commission, First Report, 1843* (508), 13:28; *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Select Committee on Accidents in Mines, 1835* (603), 5:81.
63. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Select Committee on Accident in Mines, 1835* (603), 5:139; *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Midland Mining Commission, First Report, 1843* (508), 13:lix.
64. *Parliamentary Papers, Royal Commission for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix to First Report of Commissioners, Part I, 1842* (381), 16:13.
65. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Midland Mining Commission, First Report, 1843* (508), 13:lxii, cxxxvi.
66. Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland, 4.
67. James Riley has proposed that the social definition of "illness" is even more important than the physical symptoms of illness in defining who is sick in a given historical period. See James C. Riley, *Sick, Not Dead: The Health of British Workingmen during the Mortality Decline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
68. J. R. Leifchild noted this obstacle in *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix I, 1842* (381), 16:524–25.
69. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix, 1842* (381), 16:487, 553.
70. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Sir Henry T. De La Beche and Sir Lyon Playfair, Report on the Gases and Explosions in Collieries, 1846* (529), 43:17.
71. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix, 1842* (381), 16:817.
72. *Ibid.*, 16:854.

73. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners, Royal Commission for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix to First Report of Commissioners, Part I, 1, 1842 (381), 16:157, 441.*

74. See, for example, *The Explosion of Felling Colliery*, 2–8; Kenyon, “Working Underground,” 19–21.

75. *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Committees, Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines and Manufactories, Appendix I, 1842 (381), 16:644, 650, 651.* Companies that manufactured prosthetic limbs made special appeals to the maimed worker. See, for example, *United States Orthopedic Institute for the Application of Improved Anatomical Machinery to the Treatment of Every Variety of Deformity* (Philadelphia: George W. Yerger and John Ord, 1850).

# From Normandy to the Roer: A Foot Soldier's Unsentimental Account of Combat with the 29th Division

EMIL WILLIMETZ

*Editor's Note:* What follows is part of an unpublished autobiography. Emil Willimetz, the son of Austrian immigrants who arrived in New York City in 1913, was born in 1918. He grew up in New York, was drafted in April 1943, and went to Mississippi for infantry training with the 69th Infantry Division. His outfit arrived in Normandy sometime near the end of June 1944, and Willimetz became one of thousands of replacements for the 29th Infantry Division. That division, originally made up of National Guard regiments from Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, would suffer nearly 300 percent casualties in the coming eleven months, including Willimetz himself. Fifty years later he sat down to record his experience. The result is a candid, and sometimes bitter recollection of the Second World War.

## Excerpt from "‘Gringo’: The War Experience"

### France

Loaded into a troopship departing from South Hampton, I joined the crowd at the rails as we slid by the Isle of Wight, the passage out into the rough Channel. At Omaha Beach, we too were decanted into LSTs and dropped into the water just short of the sand and gravel—following the same footsteps of the D-Day troops but without the opposition. We were to replenish the 29th D-Day Division of the Pennsylvania/Maryland/Virginia National Guard. Its division patch, blue and gray, was the Korean Symbol of Life.

A crack German division, the 352nd, had moved unexpectedly into the Omaha beach area three months before D-Day but had not been detected. As a result, the 29th Division suffered higher casualties than anticipated and my replacement unit was enormous.

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We marched up from the beach and were led out into a large field where sergeants with lists of names separated us into groups. Led into a smaller field, we were allotted a buddy and told to dig in. I paired off with one of the men I had

gotten to know on the transport ship, a fresh-faced young Swede. We found a hole someone had already scooped out under a hedgerow, and crawled in to wait—a matter of weeks. They put us to work loading trucks with supplies coming off the beach. Prey to the wildest speculation and rumors, our anxiety levels, already too high, crescendoed to the point where it seemed even combat would be welcomed. It was hot during the day but nights were damp and cold. Dusk didn't fall until about 11 P.M., and dawn arrived about 4 A.M.—a short night. With two per fox-hole, one had to be out of the hole and on guard at all times. It was a severe infraction to stand guard close to a wall or any structure you could lean against; you might (many did) fall asleep. Zonked as I was for sleep, I spent my two hours tracking ghostly Nazi figures creeping around the periphery of my vision just waiting for my torpidity to take me off guard—even for the merest second. I didn't trust the officers who told us how safe we were “back here.”

Every night after dark “bed-check Charlie,” a remnant of the German Luftwaffe, came over to harass us, buzzing our lines and dropping a few bombs—anything to keep us from sleep. A great concentration of anti-aircraft weapons surrounded the beaches and the lines of supply. At night, when “Charlie” arrived, tracer shells put up a monstrous Fourth of July display that filled the sky. The Germans called it “Golden City.” It kept alive the unbearable tensions generated by the long wait.

### **Grounded Butterflies**

I have absolutely no memory as to the exact date I arrived in Normandy. In fact my memories of the entire Normandy campaign are made up of fragments. By June 30, 452,000 replacements had landed in Normandy. I suspect I must have been included in that number.

We had been delivered to the front line hedgerows through the offices of the Replacement Depot system—known with little affection as the Repple-Depple. There was a chronic shortage of men throughout the war, the result of a decision to maintain a combat army of only ninety divisions. Every division, therefore, had to stay on the line, leaving no reserves and no opportunity to pull divisions back for rest and refit.

To make up the Normandy shortfall, Eisenhower swept up men from the rear echelon. Men who thought of themselves as cooks, mechanics, and clerks found themselves as replacements for decimated rifle companies.

In the States the time of training was speeded up and men were, much to their horror, taken out of the Air Corps and put into the infantry. They thought of themselves as “Grounded Butterflies.” Part of the problem was that one-third of the draftees—men who grew up in the Great Depression—were being rejected for physical reasons.

The Repple-Depple system was grossly wasteful of life. Replacements were sent

up to the units sometimes just before or even during a battle. Completely ignorant of battle conditions men died unnecessarily, even before we had time to learn their names.

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How much better it would have been to pull units back for a refit and a chance to orient new men into survival ways with battle-wise men. My Swedish foxhole buddy off the beach was taken as a rifleman. He was killed just a few days later. As attrition quickly made us the old-timers, I found it painful to make friends only to see them as small parts on the battlefield.

One morning one of the noncoms, who worked for the Repple-Depple, came walking briskly past our foxholes. "Rise and shine! Drop yer \*\*\*\*\* and grab your socks! Up and at 'em!"

For a hazy moment I was back in Mississippi, this fatuous humor was pure Camp Shelby training camp. Cheerfully he informed us our time had come. His attempt at cheer failed to dent our deeply ingrained apprehension. But at least the suspense was over. We were rounded up, loaded on trucks and driven past endless hedgerows toward the combat zone. At the ride's end, a corporal with a 29th shoulder patch separated about thirty-five of us by name and marched us down a sunken road. I was amazed by the sight of a French peasant stoically plowing his fields—fields already more than adequately plowed by high explosives and more still coming in. Spaced out around him, with bloated stomachs and legs held stiffly in the air, were a few of his dead cows. I was subjected to my first smell of putrefying flesh.

### **On a Grassy Knoll in Normandy**

Arriving at the division area, we gathered on a grassy knoll to await assignments. The corporal who led us there was one of the few real bastards I knew in the combat zone. He bullied us with the many miseries we would be facing at the front and the gruesome ways the men we were replacing had died. It was obvious he had utter contempt for us as replacements.

Sitting on that grassy knoll apart from the other replacements, was the loneliest moment of my life. Ahead of me was the war I had feared and fought against since high school. . . . It was going into darkness with little hope of coming out.

Finally, after what seemed an endless wait, the company's first sergeant arrived. He barked at us: "Any of you dogfaces know machine-guns or mortars?"

Well . . . hadn't I once taken a machine-gun apart one Sunday in the back of the supply room? I raised my hand and was told to move to the side. A staff sergeant came up and questioned us as to how much target practice we had had with machine-guns. I kept quiet and he marched his quota off. "The rest of you," another sergeant said, "are mortar-men." Me a mortarman? Anything but! This was the

only infantry weapon I had never touched—the mortar squad kept the weapon in their barracks. I used to watch the mortar squads train. The sergeant would blow a whistle and a man would dash out with the heavy base plate and slam it on the ground. Immediately a man would scurry out with the tube, lock it into the base plate socket while a third man would quickly attach the bi-pod legs. The mortar was rarely taken apart in combat—at a crucial moment one part might not turn up.

### The Hedgerows of Normandy

*In one of the greatest intelligence failures of all time, no one had ever thought to tell the men that the dominant physical feature of the battle-field was the maze of hedgerows that covered the western half of Normandy. The combined skills of all the renowned military engineers of history could not have built a more effective system of field fortification. It was a system ready-made and waiting for a German army that fully understood its uses. The sunken lane plays a heavy role in battle history: at Antietam, Fredricksburg, Shiloh. We were rehearsed endlessly for attacking beach defenses, but not one day was given to the terrain behind the beaches.\**

Hedgerows are the result of over a thousand years of Normandy farmers piling rocks and dirt to mark off small checkerboard fields. They can be three to four feet thick, chest- and head-high, and topped with bushes and small trees. A maze of sunken roads criss-cross the terrain. Stone houses and barns are easily turned into fortified strong points by the Germans.

This maze of thick earthen walls and sunken lanes was my introduction to combat. . . . As we left the grassy knoll we were given ammo and rations to carry up. Immediately in front of us we could hear the sounds of combat—the ripping force of rapid-fire German machine-guns and the explosion of shells. We crept close to the hedgerows, fearfully keeping our heads down. The sergeant, calm and seemingly unconcerned, led the way.

Our mortar position was established in a pit dug in the field in back of a hedgerow. The nasty corporal turned out to be the mortar gunner of my squad. The men had foxholes cut into the hedgerow itself, and I was given one, dug apparently by the man I was replacing.

I was assigned a partner by our squad leader, Sergeant Schwartz. Foxholes, I found, were always occupied on the buddy system. My buddy was a young replacement who must have been eighteen but looked younger. That afternoon on line we were subjected to our first artillery barrage. When the shells fell nearby he clutched

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\* Charles Cawthon, *Other Clay: A Remembrance of the World War II Infantry* (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 80–81.

the edge of my jacket and pulled me to him. While the barrage upset me too, trying to give him comfort helped me surmount my fears. I tried to reassure him with the notion that this was the safest place to be, under a thick blanket of earth. But the impact of shells, as they pounded our hedgerow and showered dirt down on us, was terrifying. His face became more and more rigid and his eyes more unfocused. His response was to curl up tightly, his face buried against his knees, and shiver. He began a monotonous chant, which took me some time to decipher. He was saying: "Bombs are coming gotta get away . . . gotta get away . . . gotta get away." Suddenly he started to claw his way out of the hole. I grabbed his legs and pulled him back. Fortunately, I was a lot bigger and could hold his shaking body down until the barrage lifted.

When I released him, he swam out of the hole on his belly like a turtle and started crawling across the field. Sergeant Schwartz and I lifted him to his feet and hauled him to the aid station, his body as we dragged him was rigid. His eyes opened and closed spasmodically. We never did see him again. When we returned, the sergeant looked at me very carefully, as though evaluating my survival qualities.

"We lose a few this way, but never this soon." He started to walk away, then spun on his heels, tapping the shovel dangling on his belt. "This is your best friend. Use it!"

I was lucky to get into the mortars instead of a rifle platoon. Mortarmen didn't have to lead the attack or go on patrols. The order of attack, as in the more open fields of northwestern Germany, was usually two rifle platoons in front, the weapons platoon (us) in the center, and a rifle platoon following. We were precious to the life of the company since with our machine-guns and mortars we were the first line of defense against enemy counterattacks.

Firing our mortars of course attracted enemy mortar and artillery fire. The greatest source of wounds in World War II (as high as 70 percent) came from mines and mortar and artillery shells.

### **Battle for a Hedgerow**

As we sat with our backs to the hedgerow eating our C-rations that first night with the squad, word came down that we were to attack in the morning. At this news, my obnoxious corporal, the mortar gunner, and his assistant, who were joshing with me about being a "combat virgin," fell silent. They wouldn't look at me or each other as the sergeant outlined our role in the coming attack. Then he turned to me.

"Your job will be to bring shells up to the assistant gunner, as he calls for them." We had stacked boxes of shells against the hedgerow wall to be safe against direct hits. "I'll be up ahead with the telephone where I can call in the shots. Since we all will be busy you have to keep your eye open for any German infiltration on our flanks. This is ideal sniper country. Sharpshooters hide in trees and in the

hedgerows. Look for them. You may have noticed that our officers hide their insignia of rank. Snipers prefer them to lowly dogfaces.”

“As soon as we open fire the Germans will return mortar fire, trying to knock us out. They frequently counterattack and it’s the job of the mortars and machine-guns to stop them. You probably will be scared [expletive], but you gotta know that we all will be too. Just do your job.”

In the morning our attack began with a brief artillery barrage. A squad of riflemen had joined us and were nervously peering through the thick hedgerow foliage. The Germans had machine-guns at opposite hedgerow corners and men with rifles or semi-automatic weapons were stationed along the walls. Suddenly all hell broke loose. Heavy machine-gun fire ripped through the hedgerow, and mortar shells began dropping in the field behind us. Our sergeant, nestled somewhere in front of us, started to call in firing coordinates and our shells were sent flying. Terrified, I plastered myself against the wall. Who could survive this hell! Then I heard a scream: “Shells . . . God damn it!”

I scurried over with a bag of shells. The mortarman, wearing earphones, was huddled behind his gun feverishly working the elevation and the traverse according to the sergeant’s instructions. His assistant was pulling safety pins and dropping shells down the tube as fast as he could. Both were trying to huddle as low as possible in the pit and still function. I ran back to the shelter of the hedgerow.

As we fired mortar rounds at the German positions and our machine-gunners fired to keep the enemy down, our riflemen crept over the hedgerow. I couldn’t believe it! How could they do this? They ran toward the German line firing their rifles and throwing grenades. Then it all stopped. The Germans had retreated.

We, too, moved up to prepare for the next attack. Medics were tending to our wounded. But hardly had we begun to dig our new mortar pit when we were deluged by artillery fire. The air was full of menace—high-pitched screaming shells came in from all directions. We lay flattened out in our shallow pit for an eternity. The ground shook with the impact of the shells and clods of dirt showered down on us. It was as close to the end of life as I could imagine and it seemed to go on forever. When the explosions stopped we heard someone yell, “Counterattack!” The two mortar men jumped to attend our weapon and I was told to peer through the hedge to see if the action was coming our way. Riflemen were running up to the hedgerow and in the corner I could see them mounting a machine-gun. Grey figures were pouring over the opposite wall and there was a firestorm of noise and activity. It was bedlam. I knelt down and pressed my head tightly against the wall, trying to squeeze the panic out of my mind.

The Sarge joined me, angrily shaking my shoulder where my light carbine hung. “Use this now! We need all the firepower we can get.” Putting my carbine on top of the hedgerow I started firing at the grey figures. The Sarge shouted instructions at the mortar crew and our shells began dropping into the field in front of us.



Our machine-gun fire suddenly stopped and I could see the gunner fall away back into the field. Someone else grabbed the gun and the firing started up again. Suddenly mortar shells other than ours also dropped into the field ahead. The grey figures melted back across their hedgerow wall. I was later told we had been helped by 81mm mortars from our heavy weapons company.

In the unsettling quiet after the combat, I looked around expecting to find most of our company annihilated. Amazingly our mortar squad had survived intact. Our machine-gunner lay dead at our feet, a bullet in his forehead, and in the field in front of us a few GIs were mixed in among the grey figures. I was befuddled. I was not sure if I had killed, but if I had, it was mechanical and impersonal. It was an accident of birth that I wore a GI uniform. Had my father not escaped Austria when he did, I could have been wearing field grey on the wrong side of the hedgerow!

As we went back to digging, the corporal jeered at me for my behavior under fire. Sergeant Schwartz said something sharp to him and he turned away. The Sarge came and sat down next to me.

"You did fine Willi, for your first fire fight. These hedgerows are our worst enemy in attacks and our best friend in counterattacks. Every battle sound seems to be aimed against you, . . . Hang in there, you'll sort it out. Half the noise is friendly—learn that first. An enemy bullet kind of zings as it goes by, if it cracks take cover, it's close. The same for artillery. You get to know where shells will land by how they scream. Artillery comes in at an angle, digs into the ground and most of the shrapnel sprays forward. Mortar shells come straight down and fragments fly out in a circle—daisy cutters. Dive for cover with artillery shells, keep going with mortars. Better to get it in the legs than in the head. We got guys who can instantly tell you the pedigree of each shell, its caliber, trajectory and where it will land. Be surprised how fast you learn."

Sergeant Schwartz was a short, stocky man a few years older than the average in our squad. On his square frame, without a discernible waistline, his pants hung as though about to fall down, which could have given him a comic aspect but never did. He was from Brooklyn, but he had all the characteristics of a Bronx boy from my neighborhood. I identified with him and he had my total allegiance. Having a decent noncom made all the difference in keeping my sanity in those first weeks. I didn't realize how lucky I was in this until I talked with other replacements.

I was lucky, too, in joining a battle-wise company that had already many miles of hedgerow fighting behind them. As I grew accustomed to the battlefield noise and could sort out friendly fire from enemy, I started to build up confidence. It wasn't until we received another batch of replacements that I realized how attrition had taken its toll, day by day, and my newfound confidence started to erode.

## Counterattack

When the Sarge yelled, "Counterattack!" he was courting dark reprisals. Orders from General Gerhardt were to call such attacks "Enemy Enthusiasms." "Attack" had frightening connotations, but was it really believable that someone in a moment of panic would scream "Enemy Enthusiasms?" As far as I experienced, no one ever did.

Listening to the talk of the old-timers, I learned that in many instances the enemy had superior weapons, particularly for hedgerow fighting. "We would be very happy to swap weapons with the krauts," Sergeant Schwartz told me.

Along with the many elite German outfits in Normandy were paratrooper divisions—the best-armed infantrymen in Europe. Each paratroop division was equipped with 930 light machine-guns, eleven times as many as the 29th Division. The average German rifle company had twenty machine-guns and forty-three submachine-guns. Our companies had two machine-guns and nine BARs (Brown-ing Automatic Rifles). The BAR fired a stately put . . . put . . . put . . . and was answered with the terrifying, shrieking rip of the German guns, a stitch of bullets at 1,200 per minute that could literally cut a man in half. Adding that they had six mortars to our two, it meant they had six to twenty times our firepower. In the close-in spaces of Normandy, mortars caused by far the greatest number of American casualties.

On the other hand, our M-1 rifle, firing eight rounds as rapidly as you pulled the trigger, was superior to the German rifle. We also had air superiority, although with all the tight hedgerow in-fighting, we seldom benefited from the air force. That July was the wettest in forty years, which kept our planes grounded for much of the time.

About our Sherman tanks, the less said the better. One morning we were told in our briefing that we were to attack from behind our tanks. I was startled to hear a groan go up from the riflemen. Tanks attracted enemy artillery and enemy tanks.

As an anti-tank weapon we had the bazooka, which required a two-man team. The Germans had the panzerfaust, operated by a single soldier and far superior as a tank-buster.

The attack started with a brief artillery barrage. As it lifted, my squad dropped mortar shells in the corners of hedgerows up ahead, hopefully on enemy machine-gun nests. Off to our flank we heard our Sherman tank column clanking down a sunken road. The lead tank had a vertical steel bar attached to its front end. Veering off the road it crashed through a gate in our field, and raced to attack the opposite hedgerow like an enraged rhino. On breaking through, it began shelling the German positions. Other tanks followed. A sudden, loud, sharp crack, like a giant bullet out of a great rifle barrel, snapped out of the blue. The lead tank jumped, stopped, and shuddered. The German forward observers had the field zeroed in and a hidden 88 was blasting our tanks. We could hear the round rico-

chet inside the tank, exploding ammo and setting the tank on fire. The fire was almost instantaneous, and a turret opened for a flame-shrouded tank to emerge—but only half-way. It was a horrifying sight and sickening. There was little we could do to help. Fire from our tanks or our artillery must have found the source of the 88 fire—they broke into the field ahead and we followed through. It was a short gain. Increasing 88 fire stopped our tanks and we dug in for the next round of hedgerow fighting.

Normandy was an infantry battle; tanks could do little in closed-in hedgerow country. The light U.S. Sherman tank, with two-inch armor plating, was no match for the heavier German tanks, particularly the Panthers and Tigers, with six-inch plating and superior cannon. The Germans called the Allied tanks, “Tommy cookers.” U.S. tankers called them “Ronson Burners,” because advertisements boasted that these cigarette lighters faithfully “lit on the first try.”\*

Even where the open plains of northern Germany gave our faster tanks a better chance of survival, we hated to see them. Tanks drew artillery fire. Cowered in narrow slit-trenches with a battle of multi-ton dinosaurs racing around us, we sweated out the odds—would one cross our slit trench the short or the long way? The difference could be worth our lives.

How to use tanks in the hedgerow country was one of the many unsolved problems of D-Day planners. It took a lowly sergeant to improvise a partial solution. He welded a vertical steel cutter-bar to the front of a tank so it could tear open a hedgerow. It was only then, as they poked through hedgerows and poured fire on machine-gun nests in the opposite field, that we learned to appreciate them. Occasionally the tankers had white phosphorous shells and the carnage they caused the Germans was hideous. The fiery chemical stuck to their clothing, burning deeply into their bodies. Fortunately, the enemy had few of these shells to expend on us.

Many a tank commander was killed peering out of his turret to direct fire. It took an unidentified GI to suggest a solution—attach a telephone connection underneath the blind tank so that an infantryman could direct the tank fire. (It was probably a mortarman, since we communicated with our frontline observation post by telephone.)

The German 88, was a cannon that fired in a flat trajectory like a rifle, faster than the speed of sound, twenty shells per minute. It was mounted on tanks as an

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\* The real scandal in U.S. equipment was the decision to stay with the M-4 Sherman tank instead of the new M-26 Pershing with its 90mm gun, improved silhouette, and thicker armor. By the end of the war, 3rd Armored Division, with a table of organization of 232 tanks, had lost 648 tanks destroyed in combat, with a further 700 damaged but repairable. See Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 463.

anti-tank, anti-aircraft, anti-personnel weapon. Being “personnel,” we naturally despised and feared it. It was one of our most hated combat weapons.

Eighty-eight gunners had few scruples about using their fearful weapon as a rifle against individual soldiers. Once we had to traverse a sunken road and climb over an earth wall on the far side. An artillery observer had the 88 zeroed in and was playing a cat-and-mouse game with us, trying to blast us off as we crossed the hedgerow. One victim was groaning in the road before us; the 88 shell hadn’t hit him directly, but had sand-blasted him off with a shower of dirt, stripping him of most of his clothes and much of his skin. He was alive but bleeding from every pore. Although he never returned to the company, we heard that he had survived.

It made for anxious moments of decision. Some started and dodged back, hoping to trigger the fire, then climb up and over before the spotter could alert the gunner for a second shot. When my turn came I took the pack off my back, threw it over the barrier and dove after it.

My fellow ammo bearer, at this point, was a nervous, volatile, thin Italian. He said he was a Wall Street runner from New York City. Whatever his work entailed, he certainly didn’t fit the description of “runner.” He had long, narrow feet and walked splay-footed. We called him Wall Street. Going for rations at night, I would let him lead the way back. If there was a root, stone, or the least impediment in the path he would trip over it. It was mean of me, I admit it, but it saved me many a fall.

When our assistant gunner was hit, I moved up to take his place. The gunner, my sour unfriendly corporal, was one of few left from the original Pennsylvania National Guard. He kept apart from the rest of the squad and showed little interest in giving me instructions on the mortar. The only instruction I can remember getting from him, since it was my job as assistant gunner to set up the mortar, was: “Watch what yer doing placin’ the god-damn mortar—we lost some men when they elevated the tube too far and the shell hit the leaves of a [expletive] branch overhead.”

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## Heavy Losses

In the battle for Normandy, the Germans retreated slowly, inflicting great damage on us. The 29th’s rifle companies had lost 100 percent casualties and probably more among officers. The casualties for my 115th regiment in June (including D-Day), were 1,138 men. For July, in the hedgerows, they were 1,414, our highest monthly loss of the war.

Although there were variations, there was a horrible sameness about this combat. There were twenty miles of hedgerows between Omaha beach and the more open ground, fifteen to sixteen of them per mile. Slated to be conquered by D+5, it took two bloody months. Each combat day we had to dig two mortar pits and two

foxholes—with a small shovel. During the short nights, half the squad had to stay awake on guard duty, and two had to go back for supplies. Adding to the tension of daily combat, every man was in a constant state of complete exhaustion. Sleep was never refreshing. You went to sleep with a dull gray numbness in your head and heavy leaden fear in the pit of your stomach and woke with them perpetually there.

By mid-July, the Wehrmacht had lost some 117,000 men, yet the German will to fight never seemed to diminish. German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel told his young son, Manfred, the grim truth. “All the courage didn’t help. . . . Sometimes we had as many casualties on one day as during the whole of the summer fighting in Africa in 1942. My nerves are pretty good, but sometimes I was near collapse. I have never fought with such losses.”\*

By the end of July the Wehrmacht still had about 750,000 men in the American sector; we had about 800,000. The major difference was that we were getting many more replacements than they were.

One day, the 30th Division relieved us and we pulled back to a hill a short distance away. On the morning of July 25, as we lay on our backs in the sun, we heard the faint drone of bees in the distance, tiny dots that materialized slowly into twelve-plane echelons. Filling the sky above us, some three thousand bombers were coming over in successive waves. They were to pulverize the German front lines for the Third Army breakout. German ack-ack managed to knock down a few of the lead planes but was quickly vaporized by the tornado of falling bombs. We were on our feet cheering. Then, to our great horror, the smoke that marked the drop zone started to drift back toward us and bombs fell on the 30th.

We later learned that 111 of our men died and four hundred more were wounded. It killed the highest ranking officer to die in the war, Lt. Gen. Leslie McNair, who had come up to observe the effects of the bombing. We could have told you, General—war kills! The 30th, between Normandy and the Bulge, was bombed thirteen times by “friendly” planes. They called the Ninth U.S. Air Force, the “American Luftwaffe.” There were times when we too were hit by our own planes and times our attack planes saved the day, so it was always with mixed emotions that we greeted any announcement of air support.

## Breakout

When my First Army opened the hole at Vire, Patton’s Third Army broke through into the more open fields of France.

On August 7 the Germans attempted a breakthrough at Mortain. The concept was to cut off Patton’s Third Army from his supply line. For the second time in a

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\* Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1993).

few weeks, the 30th Division relieved us and again suffered the brunt of the counterattack. That afternoon the British and U.S. air forces heavily bombed and strafed the road, the British Typhoon attack-bombers being particularly impressive with rows of rockets secured under their wings. The road was turned into one long, stinking junkyard.

Entrapped by Allied forces in the Falaise Pocket, some 10,000 German soldiers died and 50,000 were taken prisoner. Since much of the Wehrmacht equipment had been reduced to being drawn by horses, their bodies were added to the carnage. (The Germans used 2,700,000 horses to move the Wehrmacht transport and artillery. Horses, of course, didn't need gas, which was in increasingly short supply.)

In his *Crusade in Europe*, General Dwight D. Eisenhower commented, "It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh. The smell was all-pervading and overpowering. So strong in fact that pilots of light artillery observation aircraft reported that the stench affected them even hundreds of feet in the air. The unburied Germans, swollen to elephantine grossness by the hot sun, lay with blackened faces in grotesque positions. Here was no dignity in death."<sup>\*</sup>

Happy as I was to see the end of the Normandy offensive, it appalled me to see the horrible price paid by the Germans. As we marched past the garbage dump of mutilated bodies we were very much aware that this could have been us.

The charnel house that was Normandy climaxed with a fitting ending at Falaise. It took eighty days of combat and some 637,000 casualties to accomplish what our planners envisioned would take D-Day plus twenty to thirty days. The heaviest casualties were not, as anticipated, on the beach. Not quite the scale of Verdun, but close.

### Maastricht, Holland September 29, 1944

We disembarked in Visé, Belgium and were trucked into Maastricht, Holland. The brass seemed anxious to get me to the Aachen front, the first major battle on the Siegfried Line. Maastricht was our corps base for the Aachen and Roer River drives. In our few days in Holland, the battalion was brought up to strength and we received a replacement to fill out our squad. He was from the New York town of Canajoharie. He reminded me of Tommy Wentworth, a bit taller but also of slight build, with adolescent pimples, and shy until he felt at ease with you. As wary as I was of letting someone get close to me, I couldn't help respond to his puppy dog good nature. He took Wall Street's place as second ammo bearer. In moments of exultation, he would bellow out "CANAJOHARIE!"—his personalized version of the paratrooper's "GERONIMO!" We called him "Can."

This border between Holland and Germany was coal mine country. In the flat

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<sup>\*</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (1948; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 279.

farmland great piles of slag stood stark against the blue sky. The Germans had pulled back from the first German town across the border, which we promptly occupied. As we dug in our mortar at the eastern edge of the town, we stopped to watch in horror as a lieutenant led a rifle squad around the open face of one of the slag heaps in full view of the enemy. It wasn't long before they were hit by 88mm tank fire, great showers of grey slag were thrown into the air along with the toy-like bodies of the men.

Company A had taken over most of the houses for shelter and were busy inventorying food stocks the Germans had left behind. In the backyard of the house where we had dug in and sited our mortar, we found a two-hundred-pound pig.

Obviously in the way of our combat efficiency, someone put a carbine bullet into the squealer's head. We hastily dragged it up into the attic (no sense disturbing neighboring squads). . . .

### German Coal Miner

The Germans had retreated to the next town which proved to be better fortified, but left behind some of their civilians. The people waited out the battle deep down in a mine shaft made over as an air-raid shelter. The captain called me down to interpret for him.

As I labored with my not-that-fluent German, I could hear the twang of a guitar deeper down the tunnel. It wasn't until I recognized the piece as a Spanish Loyalist song that my ears really stood erect and I hurried to explain to these folks that they were obligated to leave the town for some place in Holland until the front was pushed much further back into Germany. They protested and they wept, but it was for their own safety, wasn't it? Finally the captain lost his patience and told me to tell them to shut up and stop sniveling or we would run them out through the [expletive] German mine fields to join their [expletive] retreating relatives. I said it, of course, much nicer than he did—I was at a loss for such profanity in my German lexicon.

Freed from duty I dashed off down the shaft to find the guitarist, who had gone through "Los tres insurgent generales," "Freiheit," and was now on "The Peat Bog Soldiers"—songs from the Spanish Civil War and French concentration camps. It was a German coal miner who in reply to my excited questions told me that he had learned them in Spain fighting in the anti-fascist German Thaalmann Brigade. (Some five thousand Germans and Austrians fought in the International Brigade.) He had a long, lean face, a nose to match, and thin, bitter lips. It was the kind of face that needs time to grow on you. He was not a warm spontaneous personality but seemed pleased to find someone interested in his life story.

We hadn't gotten very far when, behind me, I heard my name being called. He drew me a map to indicate the house he had appropriated, and I dashed off. That night I cut off a slab of ham and went for an interesting visit. The ham made the

right impression, but he had something to match: a washtub full of mashed sugar beets that had been fermenting to feed a makeshift still. We sat on the floor before the still and took turns tossing off tiny glasses of raw moonshine as it dripped from the coils.

He was a coal miner, not in this town but from a different town also on the border with Holland. Since some of the coal shafts opened into the Dutch mines, the German union miners would use them to smuggle political undesirables on the Nazi list out of Germany.

"One day," he said, "they tell me, better get yourself out. I go into Holland, to Spain."

I told him that I too had wanted to go to fight in Spain, but was too young.

"Ach, your Lincoln Brigade, great casualties, many too intellectual for war."

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When the Loyalists were defeated, my coal miner, along with remainders of the International Brigades, crossed the border. The French received them not as exiles but as criminals. Led off to poorly equipped concentration camps, the men had to survive on 1,600 calories per day. When the Germans combed the camps for forced labor battalions, "I say, I am coal miner, and they send me here—full circle."

### Battlefield Promotion

In the morning, after a heavy artillery barrage, we attacked across the beet fields. I had no idea whether I was sicker from my usual fear of combat or from my hangover. They were similar feelings. After months of close hedgerows and fortresses Brest in-fighting\*, one would expect the great open vistas of the northern German plains would be welcome relief. But it was flat, featureless terrain with no place to hide. Our heavy artillery fire falling on the edge of town kept the Germans down as we staggered across the field. We, however, were getting some fire from hidden tanks and from our German mortar counterparts. Our two rifle platoons disappeared into the edge of the town. As I staggered across the field I was absorbed in searching for any slight depression that would at least partially shelter me. I had spotted a shell hole when I heard Sarge urgently shout: "Gunner's hit! Willi, take the mortar! Set it up in this shell hole."

I grabbed the mortar where it had fallen and fell with it into the pit.

"Change helmets with Gunner!"

In the lining of Gunner's helmet was a table of firing ranges. Sarge and the Miner dragged Gunner off to the closest house, leaving me alone with Can and the mortar.

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\* Willimetz and the 29th Division had participated in the bloody fighting around Brest, a useless action that cost the division thousands of casualties before the occupying German units—cut off and surrounded—surrendered.



Hunkered down in the shell hole I read the chart—for XXX yards it called to elevate the mortar to forty-five degrees. As I fumbled around trying to set the tube at forty-five degrees I called for Can to arm four shells.

In town there was fierce fighting. The Germans had mounted a counterattack. Our hold on the town was tenuous and when someone yelled TIGER TANK! it was wisely decided to pull back. In a panic I fired off the four shells, hoping they were clearing the village and doing good. A knot of German prisoners emerged from the house carrying a huge couch, on which lay our gunner. Typical overstuffed German furniture, I foolishly thought! Staggering across the uneven field with the great couch was our sergeant, wedging a fistful of rags tightly in the wounded man's stomach. He motioned for us to join them. I noticed that our sergeant was also wounded, blood staining his left sleeve.

I folded the mortar, hot tube and all, hoisted it across my shoulder, and lit out in the general direction of the retreat. I passed the corporal on his overstuffed couch, the prisoners marching as fast as they could across the open field. Even with the panicky knowledge of Tiger tanks entering the town behind me, I moved as in a nightmare, slowly, in my funk slipping helplessly on mashed sugar beets. The great German tanks never made it to this edge of town in time to shell us. Next time they will, I shuddered to think..

Back in our cozy house, Sarge said, "Yer the gunner now, Willi, who's yer choice for assistant?"

"Can, I guess. He seemed pretty steady out there. But, hey, I was never really trained on the mortar."

"You'll learn!" he said and left for the aid station.

Another unrewarded promotion! A gunner rated a corporal's double stripe and extra pay. But not for me! I only get to carry the heavy mortar and fire it with the instructions under my hat. I missed the sergeant; we all did. Fortunately his wound was light and in five weeks he was back with the squad.

The next attempt at crossing the field was to be a major effort, with more artillery, air cover, and tanks. This time there was to be no retreat; we were to dig in, if necessary, in the open field. That kind of briefing foretold heavy opposition and heavy casualties.

Our seldom seen kitchen unit had moved up and we had a rare "hot" meal, served outside in the dark. We filed by the cooks who filled our mess gear with stuff. Our squad sat around the mortar eating. In the chill October air, the food had gotten cold and the mess gear was full of unpleasant surprises. I could identify greasy lamb stew, beets, mashed potatoes—all mixed with dabs of orange jello. . . .

After washing our gear, we sat around in our cellar, our normal pre-attack queasy stomachs made worse by the greasy dinner. Walled in by our fears there was little talk. I stood a two-hour guard duty after midnight, out by my mortar tube.

Back at the cellar the bodies were packed so tightly I had to quickly slip into my relief's slot before it closed up and disappeared. I listened to the grunts and cries of the sleeping men and fell asleep.

We took off as usual behind our two rifle platoons. Some of the men were carrying long ladders. For what? To scale walls, cross moats? I had little time to speculate. We were instantly deluged by artillery and mortar fire. I automatically dove to the ground. But having to dive and rise with the heavy mortar soon exhausted me and I just ducked my head and plodded blindly ahead. I hissed "Spread out, spread out" at Can who tended to drift too close to me.

About halfway across the field I noticed very few men still on their feet and I, too, dropped. Tired and numb with fear I lay still, pressing my body as flat as possible against the ground. I moved very slowly, and, shifting my pack and mortar to protect my head, I detached my folding shovel. With a minimum of movement I started to dig, keeping my shovel handle flat to the ground. With mortar and artillery shells exploding around me and showering me with earth, it took complete concentration.

Dimly I became aware of Can calling, "Hey Willi, what do we do now? Hey Willi!"

"Stay where you are." I shouted back. "Put your ammo bags and pack in front of your head and play dead. I'll call when the hole is big enough for both of us."

Fully absorbed in digging as I was, I soon was astonished to find I had excavated a slit trench two feet deep and wide enough for two. The shelling had slowed to an occasional round, and all seemed static on the battlefield. I called for Can to crawl slowly to me and we took turns in digging down to about four feet. I was glad to have him for company. He obviously looked up to me for help.

"What do we do now?" he asked again.

"We stay in this hole until someone whistles us out to attack or tells us to retreat."

## Tanks

Suddenly I became aware of tank noises; our promised tank support had arrived. I had dug my foxhole parallel to the German lines in the hope that oncoming or retreating tanks would cross my burrow's short dimension. Tanks that came close made a horrible rumble in our slit trench, and dirt dribbled down the sides. We could hear the cough of our Sherman 75mms, the sharp crack of answering 88s on the German tanks and the rumbling explosions of tanks going up in flames. Finally the tanks left and a heavy silence settled on the battlefield.

Books were an important ingredient in my surviving the long hours of isolation in foxholes. Blanketed by leaden fear, they gave me short periods of relief. I wedged myself in a corner of the slit trench and pulled out a book. It was Mark Twain, and I found my self snorting at his humor. Can grabbed my arm.

"Take it easy, Willi, it'll be all right."

He had become unnerved at my withdrawal. I put the book away and we talked about his part of New York State, the Finger Lakes and the nearby Adirondacks. He had worked in the Beechnut plant but hoped to pick up more education when he got home.

I heard the approach of a body, slithering, and peeked out nervously, revolver in hand and cocked. It was the company runner. "What's up?"

"The Germans have pulled back in several places. The captain thinks we can gain the town without much trouble. C Company will push through us and we'll follow them in."

"What's left of A Company?"

"Hard to say with everybody holed up. We lost a few, that's for sure, and some tanks."

Actually the enemy had withdrawn and we were able to dig our mortars on the far side of the captured town. Setting aiming stakes around the mortar, I put Can in a hole to our front with a telephone. In an attack he would guide our fire by our numbered stakes. "Eight hundred yards, stake three. Fire one. More to the left, fire one. Good, fire three." As the attack came in closer I would be able to see my own shell bursts and pull Can back to us. Over the next weeks we managed to make it as a team. I found that the more responsibility I had, the better I could survive the tension. I never did learn what the ladders were for.

## Artillery

*Being shelled is the real work of an infantry soldier, which no one talks about. Everyone has his own way of going about it. In general, it means lying face down and contracting your body into as small a space as possible. In novels you read about soldiers, in such moments, fouling themselves. The opposite is true. As all your parts are contracting, you are more likely to be constipated.\**

In northern Germany we frequently attacked across flat, open fields, our hearts chugging away a mile a minute. With the expectation of incoming artillery I would scan the ground ahead of me, evaluating it for even the least depression to dive for. Once on the ground I would get as close to the earth as my clothing allowed. I quickly learned that there was no such thing as a flat surface.

Random and impersonal shell fire is total terror. One day the company was pulled back for a little rest and hot food. The kitchen truck arrived with our barracks bags, a rare opportunity to get at our personal effects. For me it was a

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\* John Ellis, *On the Front Lines: The Experience of War Through the Eyes of the Allied Soldiers in World War II* (New York: John Wiley, 1991), 69.

chance to pick up a few more pocket books. It meant, too, that we could utilize the comfort of our sleeping bags. The kitchen crew set up a chow line and served hot food. At the end of the line they placed a garbage can with soapy water for us to wash our mess gear. We were sitting around enjoying the break, when out of the blue a single shell whistled in and exploded, a direct hit on the garbage can. One of our men at the can was killed instantly, bloodily ripped apart by the explosion, shrapnel, and pieces of can. No other shells landed. It was entirely random, purposeless—more upsetting to us than a deliberate artillery attack. It negated any good the rest stop had afforded.

On their home territory the Germans made copious use of mines. Our engineers, when possible, marked off paths through a minefield with white tape. We followed the tapes, stepping in the footprint of the man in front with heart-stopping precision, praying his shoe was a larger size than yours. Ultimate horror was to get stuck in a minefield during an artillery attack.

### **Monty Puts Us in the Spot**

The most bizarre night battle was fought under Monty's [Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery] auspices. The 29th Division, as part of the Ninth U.S. Army, was briefly attached to Monty's drive to the Rhine. We arrived at his command in trucks late in the day. Each of our companies had a Limey guide to take us through the British troops holding the line. These troops, wearing berets in contrast to our large iron helmets, had scooped out pits big enough for five or six men and were busy brewing tea. Each group seemed to be well equipped with hard biscuits and large #10 restaurant tins of bitter orange marmalade. I am very fond of bitter orange marmalade, especially as made in England. While we waited for it to get dark, I garnered from our mortar squad an assortment of "C" rations (canned meals—some good, some not) and negotiated a swap for a large can of marmalade. It made an enormous heavy hump in my pack but was well worth it.

At dark, a long line of powerful searchlights mounted on Sherman tanks and directed into German eyes was turned on, and we attacked down its beams. Talk about chasing your shadow! In the flat Rhineland plain, mine was a hundred feet long. We never got to punch out Nazi eyes with light as was planned; instead we found ourselves silhouetted like moths. Suddenly German machine-guns opened up and the picturesque shadows all disappeared. Fortunately, Montgomery, being the careful Scot he was, turned off the lights and aborted the attack before casualties became too high.

I came across a clue recently to Montgomery's odd behavior. It seems in England dogs are trained to run down a strong beam of light to catch a hare. In our case, the hare could fight back. It is historically interesting that the Soviet Red Army tried the same searchlight stunt on the Vistula River in Poland with similarly

negative results. Not to be outdone by other military geniuses, the 29th also indulged in theatrical stage lighting.

*Perhaps no single soldier's impression of the Division's campaign in Germany will be remembered more clearly than the strong, friendly searchlight beams which pierced the night sky throughout the long months on the river line. The lights were cast by six 60-inch, 800 million-candlepower units. Their employment was to provide battlefield illumination by creating "artificial moonlight."\**

Four of the six units were promptly knocked out by enemy artillery. All to the good—the last thing we needed was “battlefield illumination.”

According to General Montgomery, “The good general must not only win his battles; he must win them with a minimum of casualties and loss of life.”

HURRAH, we say, for Montgomery! He himself had been severely wounded in World War I and never lost sight of the ultimate truth of war—battles were won with the lives of men at stake. He was known for his great concern for his troops, careful to have everything well prepared before a battle. He was looked down upon by aggressive types like General Patton, but the average infantryman thought highly of him. The British had been fighting for several years before we showed up and their manpower had been seriously depleted. His sparing use of troops was understandable. I certainly understood!

With my less than perfect German I was called upon to shout deserters out of their holes. “Kommen heraus, hände hoch!” It was a weird sensation to suddenly see little white rags pop up from holes in the ground where no one was suspected to be—sometimes within a stone's throw of our own lines. I would tell them to come on the run, leaving helmets and weapons behind. And come they did, speeded on by shots from their comrades. Since most of these surrenders took place just before a German attack, they stood nervously before me, rushing their answers, anxious to get to the rear. No more anxious than the captain and myself—the Germans would often spot-check the surrender site with a flurry of mortar shells.

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Some outfits killed prisoners on the spot, particularly snipers, who stayed behind and killed soldiers until they felt discovery was imminent and then surrendered. Happily not our 29th division—at least not often. Some paratrooper units were known to take no prisoners and as a consequence had heavier casualties—the Germans refused to surrender to them, fighting to the very end.

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\* Joseph H. Ewing, “29 Let's Go!": A History of the 29th Infantry Division in World War II (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), 206–7.

## Whispers Down a Rat Hole

In northern Germany one of our many captains was enchanted to have a German speaker in his company and for a time (fortunately it was short) he had me at his command post as a runner. His observation post was a church belfry and we spent interminable hours there while he scanned the adjacent town held by the enemy. Belfries were well known to harbor life other than bats and were nearly always eventually blown away by artillery. It was a truly nerve-wracking time. I much preferred my foxhole.

Between our town and their town was a small cluster of about two dozen unoccupied houses, a no-man's land. One day we had a German civilian in the belfry who claimed to be the mayor, and he was very agitated. He pointed out a house in the no-man's land cluster where he said some women and children were hiding in the cellar. One young girl was badly wounded and they wanted to surrender to us and get medical attention. Would we go that night and convoy them out?

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That night, I was introduced to my armed escort, a young rifleman from the 1st platoon, who seemed to stand scarcely higher than his rifle. The German mayor was nowhere to be seen. We got to the last foxhole on the edge of town and the rifleman disappeared into it.

"Hey," I said, "aren't you coming with me?"

He popped his head up. "This is where I live, this is where I stay. I don't speak German! Come on in, room enough for two."

I sat down, my feet dangling in the hole. "Hey, I need someone to watch out, I can't go in there alone." I didn't want to go even with lots of friends.

"Don't be a [expletive]! The krauts send patrols in there every night. It could be dangerous to your health."

"Well I'm going. Don't shoot when we get back."

"The password's 'Wonderful,' reply is 'Well.' Germans find it hard to pronounce their 'Ws.'" Tell me! "Stay out of the roadside ditches, they're loaded with Bouncin' Betty and Shu mines." Shu mines were small boxes filled with enough dynamite to blow your foot off. But S-mines, or Bouncing Bettys, bounced up about three feet and exploded several hundred steel fragments. It could tear off a leg or, worse, castrate you. We were inordinately not fond of Bettys.

I don't know what possessed me. It was stupid. I knew it was stupid. Let the Germans take care of their own. Where was the mayor? Walter Cronkite once said all combat soldiers were heroes . . . hell no . . . most soldiers are moved by self-survival. But almost all, under a combination of factors I am unable to describe (or understand), can be moved to an action against the instinct for self-preservation. I nonsensically felt, I guess, that in doing something humanitarian I couldn't get hurt.

The road made a sweeping curve into the houses, and I walked bent over, trying to make as small a target in the gloom as possible. The homes in the dark had absolutely no relation to the ones I saw from the belfry. Blundering house to house, I was utterly spooked by the engulfing silence.

One house had a broken cellar window, and I knelt outside it to listen. Please someone, cry! I willed it: CRY! The silence was becoming more and more menacing. I spoke quietly at the dark rectangle of broken glass. Despite how quietly I spoke the sound seemed to dominate the little town. Sound was my enemy. I broke away a few pieces of glass, but the sharp snaps were more penetrating than my voice. In desperation I gingerly worked my head through the broken window and whispered harshly: "Is anybody here? Please come out. I'll bring you back to our lines. If you're hurt, we have doctors."

I was only too conscious of how bad my Viennese German must be sounding to frightened people of the northern German plains. I could almost see a hand tightly covering a child's mouth. Suddenly I could also see my head as a black silhouette framed in the window—a sure target for anyone inside with a weapon. I pulled my head back as quickly as I could and sat for a moment, miserable and frustrated.

I saw a furtive movement at the enemy end of town, a series of shadowy forms slipping into the first of the houses. My adrenaline started to pump, my mouth went dry, and I quickly slipped out of the garden to the back of the house. It was all I could do not to break into a run. I worked my way carefully through back yards, trying to keep a screen between me and the patrol. When I came to the curve of the road I was forced out into the open; there was no cover, and the roadsides were mined. Expecting rifle fire, my back went numb with tension. I kept saying to myself, WONDERFUL/WELL, WONDERFUL/WELL as I neared our own lines. Suddenly a dark figure erupted from a hole and I almost passed out. It was my rifleman escort who silently led me back to our company. Letting it be seen that he had been with me, he deposited me at the captain's headquarters and left.

As a mortarman I wasn't called on to do night patrols. Riflemen in my company often told me how they dreaded these patrols and how fruitless and stupid they thought them to be. With the chronic shortage of officers to accompany them, the riflemen were less than conscientious about this duty. The reports they turned in were probably as close to reality as if they had really done the tour. I blessed this custom and am quite certain that I owed my life to a German patrol that went to ground in one of the first few houses of the little village and missed my furtive retreat.

Our captain ordered an artillery barrage of the little settlement when I told him the reason for my unaccompanied return. If the German patrol had indeed gone to ground, as I firmly believed, I hoped they survived the barrage—at least this once.

## **We Suffer Along with Eisenhower**

The weather was atrocious! The weather in Normandy had been mostly wet and bleak, but it was far worse in Germany. When the ground froze our little folding shovels were useless. When we attacked we either made the next town or pulled back to the one we had just left. Freezing rain was more an enemy to us than the Germans. In November it rained twenty-eight days. To add to bad weather, we had sixteen hours of gloomy darkness each night.

In a letter from a suffering Eisenhower to Marshall: "I am getting exceedingly tired of the weather that has broken records existing for 20 to 25 years."

It wasn't quite as tiring with you, Ike, as it was with us. Proper winter clothing wasn't getting up to the front lines. Our leather boots were almost worse than useless. The leather soaked up the cold water we were constantly standing in. Thousands of soldiers were being evacuated with horrible cases of trench foot that crippled some for life. In many cases a man's toes would come off when medics tried to pull off wet socks. In November 1944 the figure for trench foot casualties was 5,386 in our sector alone. In northwest Germany the total was 44,728—the equivalent of three infantry divisions.

I valued my feet too much. Thank you Mary for your wonderful gift of wool! I wore one pair of your thick, knee-length stockings under my belt and the other on my grateful feet and legs—and exchanged places every night I could. Your scarf went around my neck and under my coat almost to the ground. I not only cherished the warmth, but more so the human gentleness of the person who wove them for me.

## **The Rear Echelon**

This is probably the time to talk about the feelings fighting troops had about rear echelon troops. It wasn't just that the noncombatants were safe from harm and lived a dry, comfortable life, but that items we basically needed, and had been sent up to us by quartermasters, rarely made it. Supplies were rushed up to the front via the Red Ball Express over one-way roads, but while generals screamed for gas, and troops desperately needed basic supplies, tons were siphoned off into the black market.

To add to the black market losses, supplies reached the combat soldier only after every rear-area serviceman had taken his share. There were good boots available, of the type made popular by L.L. Bean after the war—well-insulated, with leather uppers and rubber bottoms. But to the everlasting disgrace of the quartermasters and other rear-echelon personnel, who were wearing them by mid-December, not until late January did the boots get to where they were needed. We were issued, but never received, warm khaki combat jackets with full-sized pockets vs. short, light-weight gray jackets that shone in the dark and had slit side pockets,



out of which everything fell. I'm also talking about extra blankets and, more seriously, having to wear khaki uniforms long after the winter snows had arrived, and white camouflage suits long after the snows had melted.

*PX rations, by the time they have reached a rifle company, had been picked over all down the line. It has ended up with shower slippers for riflemen.\**

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For instant satisfaction and minimum red tape our most efficient Quartermaster Corps was the battlefield itself. Hanging on my web belt I had accumulated: an extra canteen, a second first-aid packet, my mortar sight (a big, awkward box), a .45 cal. pistol (useless as a weapon, but possibly useful as a club if the Hun fell into my foxhole), and a folding shovel (my closest friend and savior). To carry this heavy load on my web belt, I requisitioned a knapsack from its dead former owner, cut off the pack, and used the shoulder straps to help support my belt.

Needing gloves on the cold open plains of northern Germany, I reached down to strip a pair from a dead soldier. He wore no gloves. Being dead too long, his skin had turned mahogany and the flesh underneath had putrefied. The skin of his hand slipped off into my hand intact. I was instantly sick and still become nauseous when this returns to memory at unguarded moments.

### Battle of the Gut: Interlude December 5, 1944

In the first week of December, from a dense line of trees and bushes, we peered down a long, steep slope of grassy pasture. At the bottom was our goal, the Roer River. Near the riverbank a neat cluster of barns surrounded a stone manor house (called a "Gut" by the Germans). For the moment our immediate front was quiet, but off to the north we could hear the sounds of very active engagement.

Word came down that the weapons platoon was to attack, take, and hold the manor house, while the rifle platoons were to take over the river shore north of us. As usual, our lieutenant had been "loaned" to an officer-less rifle platoon, so on our own we mortared and machine-gunned the complex thoroughly. Finally after much nail biting, the Sarge led us cautiously down the open slope, trailing a spool of telephone wire. A daylight, open field attack, is devoutly to be despised, but to attack and not meet opposition is almost more nerve-wracking. Except for cows mooing and chickens clucking nervously all was deadlly quiet in the Gut.

What was once an elegant stone house was now rubble. The door to the cellar stairs was ajar, and leaning against the jamb was a German rifle topped with a steel pot of a helmet.

"You go in Willi," said the Sarge, "you speak German."

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\* Ellis, *On the Front Lines*, 301.

The others laughed. Was he serious? He detached a grenade from his belt, pulled the pin, and tossed it down the stairs. The explosion made a dull, damp thump, the cellar must be large and full of stuff.

In the smoke and dust we could see no corpses, but in the back was a white rag hanging on another doorway. This time my "heraus" brought a German soldier with Hände as hoch as he could get them. He turned out to be an elderly farmer who had been drafted into the home guard and who had hidden when his troop scuttled off.

Anxious to explore the cellars, we quickly set up our machine-guns and mortars and posted guards according to the manual. What to do with our prisoner? We set aside the room he was hiding in for his quarters; he was not to leave it without permission. At first we kept a wary eye on him, but soon we shamelessly enslaved our willing charge to help out on menial tasks: stoking the stove with coal bricks, watching the cooking, washing the cooking pots, etc.

We were, of course, in communication with headquarters via our telephone wire. Sergeant Schwartz assured them that while we had had a brief firefight, we had everything under control and could hold out as long as necessary. Not to send down rations, we had potatoes and stuff, plus the slope was thoroughly mined.

The cellar was furnished as an air-raid shelter and proved to be a storehouse of provisions worthy of an Inca. A large milk can was filled with eggs preserved in waterglass (potassium silicate), a clear viscous liquid that envelops the eggs and works by excluding air. Another can contained cooked meat with six inches of fat plugging the neck. There was flour, sugar, and all kinds of condiments, a barrel of apples and glass jars of preserved fruit and vegetables. No wine or Schnapps, but a large jug of hard cider. In the courtyard stood a cart-load of potatoes. Since the door to the cellar faced east, we quickly pulled the cart before the door.

We dined elegantly! A trunk revealed an assortment of priestly robes that we wore for dinner and, for our table cloth we used a gold-embroidered vestment. Another box revealed opera hats, the kind that folded flat and you felt very elegant holding by the rim and snapping into shape. There was also an assortment of silk parasols. We became very unsoldierly dandies at dinner.

In the cavernous barn were cow stalls, each with a framed slate for the cow's name, pedigree, and daily "milch" production. The cows hadn't been milked for several days and great swollen udders hung almost to the ground. They cried out to us in pain, or so it seemed to a Bronx boy. To get this painful bedlam out of hearing we turned them loose to graze in the lush grass by the river.

There was also a neat hen house which served us better than the cowshed. We had a new replacement, Joe, who had taken Can's place as second ammo bearer. Joe, was a farm boy and he went down the roosting row of chickens, goosing them to pick the fattest. The rude awakenings were protested by loud squawks but the yield was worth the racket. Our German house mother undressed the chickens, pulling feathers off with the skin.

I had been appointed chef and felt myself a great success. Joe came to me with the exciting observation that we had all the ingredients for flapjacks but milk, so “why don’t we go down and bring back a cow.” Against all my finely honed instincts for self-preservation we did just that—in full view of the unknown and menacing opposite shore. What was not calculated in this tactical move was that you just don’t casually detach one cow from a herd. Back we came leading a cow followed by a loudly bellowing mob. Even then we had to wait for our flapjacks, as the first milking from the neglected udders came out bloody and stringy.

Finally I was able to offer a breakfast menu: apple cider, second only to the Normandy vintage, two eggs over lightly, large pancakes with syrup made with melted sugar and cinnamon. The only item from our own rations was the instant coffee.

Can had found a motorcycle and for two days diligently worked on it. By the third day he had it going out on the cobblestone courtyard, riding in tight circles and shouting—“CANAJOHARIE!” Wearing top hats and holding white parasols we cheered him on. It was a scene that interested the battalion commander who was out surveying the front with his binoculars. Unlike Disney fairytale endings, ours was not happy. We found ourselves marching off to the sound of battle, downriver.

### **Jülich-on-the-Roer**

Our all-too-brief spell of R&R [“rest and recreation”] was abruptly ended by some of the worst fighting we’d seen to date. The miraculous break in the monotony and dread only served to heighten the terror of the return to combat. This was the battle to take a sports stadium on our side of the Roer from the city of Jülich. The enemy had been driven out of their foxholes and trenches and had holed up in a fortified Sportplatz and swimming pool. Caught out in the open fields around the stadium, we were mercilessly bombarded with shellfire, machine-guns, and even depressed ack-ack batteries. With a number of others in a panic I jumped into a trench, only to come out spitting ice water. The Germans, who controlled the dams upriver, had opened them to flood the shores with winter water. Some of the ditches were also mined.

As we attacked down a sodden road in the dark, shivering with cold and fear, a sudden burst of high-velocity machine-gun fire opened up on us. We dropped to the ground and crawled off the road. A couple of dark bundles stayed behind. One turned out to be Canajoharie, who had been stitched through the middle, almost cut in two. The other was Sergeant Schwartz, hit a second time, this time in his side. It was a loss of the two men I cared most about in the platoon. It put a cap on this night of horror.

Regulations state: “No one except a stretcher bearer helps a wounded man out

of action.” Joe and I extracted the Sarge from the road and helped him to the first-aid station. I hated leaving Can sprawled lifeless, a dark heap in the wet road, but the Sarge was our first concern. It was against regulations, but it was widely done. What wounded officer would refuse help? But I can’t say our action was entirely altruistic; we were desperate to get away from the sports stadium.

In the warm first-aid station I took my gloves off to find one filled with blood. A shell splinter had pierced my numb, cold hand and I hadn’t felt it. I stepped up to one of the medics, a friend, and dangled my bloody hand. “Hey Tommy, how about a bandage?”

“Willi!” he exclaimed. “Let me look at that!”

Quickly he painted my hand with an antiseptic, wound a huge bandage around my wrist and hand, and made out a tag.

“Once you’re tagged,” he assured me, “it takes a month of routine before you get back to your outfit.” He hung the tag around my neck. “Wear it in good health.”

### Medals for Medics

Medics were as often in combat as we were but received no extra combat pay. “Since you don’t fight,” they were told. We valued our medics highly and my squad had chosen me to write up Tommy for a medal. It went through and he was happy to get it. This was the medic who had just tagged me. It was the first time anything I had written, since high school, had paid off. Did I feel guilty? Well, yes and no. That night I was as close to “breaking” as any time in my combat experience.

That night I was evacuated by truck to a monastery in the Ardennes that had been converted into a military hospital. HEAVEN! Clean white sheets!

... I felt pangs of guilt about taking advantage of my minor wound.

### Battle of the Bulge—Liege, December 16, 1944

I had been at the monastery about a week and was beginning to relax when I woke up one morning to frantic activity. Medical supplies were being packed up, switchboards torn down, and patients loaded into trucks and ambulances. It was December 16, the start of the Battle of the Bulge. We were off-loaded in the large general hospital in Liege, Belgium. That night our monastery was in German hands.

Rumors swept through the wards: we were to be moved to another, more distant hospital; those of us who could were to be given M-1 rifles and sent to the front. The Germans had dropped elite, English-speaking troops behind our lines (true) to cause havoc and to assassinate Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton. MPs stopped American soldiers at gunpoint: “Who are ‘Dem Bums?’” “Who is Mickey Mouse’s girl friend?” Completely unexpected and *crazy*! Some of the questions asked about baseball I certainly would have flunked. Ruthless SS troopers

under Joachim Peiper massacred eighty-six U.S. prisoners-of-war in Malmedy.\*

Actually we were more in harm's way than we knew. Liege was the first objective of the attack to recapture the great port of Antwerp. Hitler had launched three fully equipped armies, twenty divisions, twelve of which were armored, and the tide had reached Stavelot only twenty-two miles away. Buss-bombs literally rained into Liege. When the motors of these radio-controlled V-1 unpiloted aircraft stopped buzzing we held our breath until we heard the bomb's explosion. We cheered them when, occasionally, they turned back into Germany. Later, when the weather cleared and our air force could function, aerial dogfights took place over Liege and 50 cal. bullets and 20mm cannon shells (instead of rumors) went zinging through our windows and down the ward corridors.

From our hospital windows we watched 7th Armored tanks (usually attached to our 29th division) pour through the streets of Liege. They were coming down from the north to stem the German tide. Where the 29th was at this juncture was unknown to us. I now know that the Germans at one time contemplated their offensive along the Roer river instead of the Ardennes. I shudder to think of the fate of the 29th had they done so.

### **Return to Duty on the Roer**

I returned to the 29th Division in early January. I found it spread thinly along the river, some 700–800 yards between company platoons. It covered the entire former sector of the XIX Corps. Of course with everyone battling it out in the Ardennes, the Germans were in the same predicament on the opposite shore. The German radio taunted us: "Hello there, Two-Nine! How does it feel to be sitting in those holes by the river with nobody behind you?" Not having access to a radio ourselves, we remained untaunted.

It was a cold winter with heavy snows on the ground and we had to patrol the empty space between our platoons. Naturally no provisions had been made for white camouflage, and we were flies on white icing. Since I returned too late to garner a bed sheet, I had to make do with a set of fine lace curtains. I held the prize for upscale patrolling!

Telephone wires had been laid on the snow between platoons. When my turn came to patrol, I would pick up a wire in a gloved hand and stagger through the snow to its terminus—frequently in a blinding snow storm. Every once in a while the wire would be cut and the question to the splicer was—how? Was it shrapnel or

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\* After the war an American tribunal sentenced Peiper to death, but Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin used his influence to get the sentence commuted to life imprisonment because of Peiper's 'anti-communism.' After serving minimum time, the West German authorities let Peiper off for good behavior. He then moved to France, where a few Frenchmen with memories blew him up. See Murray and Millett, *A War to be Won*, 468.

a German patrol waiting for the splicer? It made for a suspenseful repair job. I only had a splicing assignment once. Wading in the deep snow, peering intently through a cold mist from the river, the wire in my hand was suddenly not there. I instantly dove downhill into a snow bank and lay as still as a hunted rabbit. The wily Nazis lay just as still—but where? I could feel my body temperature draining off. Slowly, indeed very slowly, I eased out a hand-grenade from my belt, put the safety pin between my teeth, and lifted my head. White nothing in all quarters. Slithering back up the slope I found my footsteps and the wire. Keeping a low profile and the grenade handy, I searched and found the severed end, made a hasty splice, and continued on to our neighboring platoon.

Life on the Roer River that January was freezing cold and deadly monotonous—it was the coldest winter in forty years. All during January we lacked winter gear. I ran around draped in my white lace curtain, my leather shoes always soggy. In February, when white camouflage clothing arrived and our vehicles were painted white, the snow all melted and we still showed up as positives against negatives. Along with the horrible weather, thoughts of the approaching river crossing constantly blanketed us with dread. The one blessing was the gradual return from the hospitals of several old buddies, foremost among them Sergeant Schwartz.

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### **Dispatch Rider of the Roer**

With not much to do besides the daily patrol of the telephone wire, Battalion sent us up a daily ration of mortar shells. We worked out a *modus operandi* with the other side of the river—we would send our shells over at noon, they at dusk. One day something new was added by our friends across the river; at dawn a motorcycle started with a loud, throaty warm-up. After disturbing the neighborhood for an unconscionably long time, it took off down some unseen road.

When the same thing happened the following morning, we sent over our daily ration of shells early, as a protest. The Germans immediately presented us with their quota. The gauntlet had been thrown. We sat around that day drawing an audio-sited map of the road. Our rifle platoons had theoretically patrolled the opposite side, and we invited a couple to join our mapping. While their first-hand knowledge was suspect, we enjoyed getting their input. In front of the mortar pit we laid out a series of stakes on which we worked out the coordinates for the firing sequence.

Long before the dawn chorus, we were up, pulling the safety pins and lining the shells on the edge of the pit. I sighted the mortar on the first setting; my assistant gunner, Joe, hovered over the tube with a shell. It was a tense moment. We wanted to deliver the shell just as he started to leave. Someone shouted “go” and as the shell exploded out of the tube I moved the tube to the second position and so on down our version of the road. Then we all scrambled for the safety of our cellar

as the return mail came in. We could hear the cycle sweetly putt-putting off in the distance.

That afternoon we asked battalion headquarters for a double ration of shells. They indicated their pleasure with our show of aggression by sending us a goodly amount. A mortar shell is a miniature bomb with four tail fins. Between the fins are increments, little bags of extra explosive powder. In the center of the tail is a shotgun shell that detonates when dropped against the firing pin at the bottom of the tube. Distance is a combination of tube elevation and the explosive propulsion of the increment bags. We were warned that a total of four increments was the safety limit. For the next morning's firing, we hung several extra increments on the fins. Tally ho!

That dawn, the dispatch rider gunned his motor extra loudly and extra long. His progress out of camp seemed deliberate and stately. We hoped he was pleased at the extra effort we made to follow him out. Back in the cellar we discussed his attitude. Was he stalling that morning out of fear or just giving us the finger?

"He reminds me of Canajoharie at the gut," said the Sarge. By making him a person, we immediately lost all interest in the contest. It was clear we had come to admire the rider. At dawn, when we heard the throaty roar, we wished him godspeed—at least I did. At noon we went back to our regular shelling and so did the Germans—acknowledgment by both sides that the Dispatch Rider had won the game.

### Night Patrol Over the Roer

As the time neared for the final assault over the Roer River, word came down to A Company—take prisoners. Information was needed about the enemy across the river. Patrols, of course, proved the officers were aggressive, even though they seldom went along. A tried-and-true patrol was put together for this purpose and, as a final touch, the captain decided I should accompany them.

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So I found myself, one cold morning around 2:00 A.M., boarding an inflatable rubber boat along with five of our Company A riflemen, each with blackened face. They looked at me with some misgivings. One of them wiped some greasy black off his face and transferred it to mine. A long piece of telephone wire, one end tied to a tree, was attached to the rear of the boat. We boarded the craft and pushed off. I guessed that the men were thoroughly briefed and knew what they were doing. The only briefing I got was a terse, "Sit still . . . stay out of the way." Frozen by cold and tension I had no intention of doing anything that was part of "the way."

The current, at ten kilometers per hour, picked us up and swept us downstream, the men paddling hard to move us across. The German shore was dark and lifeless, but up and down the river were random flares, sounds of shots, and artillery rounds.

I had a sense that the men were not really trying hard enough to overcome the current when we abruptly hit the end of the wire and flipped over. In shock, I found myself floundering in the cold water. I had lost all sense of where I was relative to the shore. Someone grabbed me by my coat collar, shook me roughly, and asked me in a harsh but muted tone, "Can you swim?"

I must have said something that satisfied him and he pulled me around. "This way to shore." And he swam off. I made it to the bushes and was pulling myself out of the water when a flare went off. I had recovered enough sense to stop moving and kept my face pressed against the bank. Letting the enemy see the whites of my eyes I knew was a fatal no-no. It took all my willpower to wait out the bright white flare, floating down slowly on its parachute. With the return of darkness I scuttled crab-like through the bushes and on to higher ground. I could hear other bodies scuffling through the foliage and moved to join them.

Led back to the cellar of a nearby house, we were given a pile of blankets and told to strip. We huddled miserably around a hot stove, but it took a long time to really feel warm. Nothing was said about the misadventure except one of the riflemen muttered, looking hard at me, "That current was too much."

"Yup," I replied. I had the feeling that the current was agreed to be too much before we started but had no notion of sharing these feelings with anyone but myself. I was too ecstatic to be off the hook.

Ecstatic too soon! A few days later I was back on the river, this time with a different and larger crew. The rubber raft had been replaced by a twelve-man pontoon, the kind I had seen the engineers use in building floating bridges. Evidently hand-picked for toughness, several men had combat knives with brass knuckle handles on their leggings; most had tommy guns slung on their shoulders and all had a hard look on their blackened faces. All I had was my useless .45 revolver and my German.

They evidently had assessed me, and then carefully placed me in the center of the craft. The noncom in charge told me they were aiming for a place just off the shore where a couple of sentries had a post. Pushing off, unattached, we made good time crossing the river. The noncom indicated we needed to move farther downriver, and we silently let the river take us. Tying up to a tree, five of the men went ashore. Motioning us to wait, they disappeared into the gloom. For an interminable time we sat in the boat expecting a flare to burst above us and all hell to break loose.

Suddenly the men returned and were hustling a German soldier aboard the boat. It was done in silence; even the German made a special effort to be soundless. I had the distinct understanding that if I had tried to indulge in conversation with the prisoner I would have been clobbered senseless with a rifle butt. Back on the other side we were met by an officer and followed him to his company headquarters. The frightened German was seated between two GIs in the back of a com-



mand car and driven off. I never said a word in German or English from start to finish.

I did ask one of the noncoms about the second sentry. He shrugged his shoulder, casually drew his hand across his throat, and walked away. I had the answer to why the prisoner was so eager to please. I was sickened by the thought—this kind of work was not done by mortarmen.

### **Dutch Coal Mine Hospitality**

On February 9 the Germans blew the Roer River dams, flooding the riverbanks again and putting off our attack for an additional two weeks. Much to our surprise we surrendered our positions to others and were pulled back to Maastricht, Holland, for showers, refitting, and special river-crossing training.

To men who hadn't had their clothes off in months, hot showers were a momentous event. The great Dutch miners' hall was awesome. Coming in from the bright daylight into the gloomy hall we were stunned by the sight of huge, black bats hanging in rows across the high-domed ceiling. It took a spell before we could decipher the objects on the ceiling as coal-blackened miners' clothes. Benches lined the walls, and long chains attached to ceiling pulleys were hooked in rows behind them. Each chain had a four-pronged grappling hook draped with dirty mining clothes pulled up tight against the ceiling. When a shift arrived, the miners would lower their mining outfit, swap costumes, and run the clean street clothes back up to the ceiling. . . . the miners' hall had showers enough for the whole shift simultaneously.

We stripped and entered the shower room to luxuriate in a long, stinging flow of hot water. Pure bliss! Back in the great hall, we lined up to throw our old uniforms and long underwear into bins and file past the Quartermaster team for clean replacements. Sizes were left up to the team's snap judgement, but having been in the same game, I called out the sizes I wanted as I passed each station. The line came to a shocked halt when I asked for an overcoat—the largest size available.

"What happened to your overcoat?"

"Lost it in combat."

"But hey, the sleeves would be inches below your fingertips!"

"That's it . . . exactly what I want."

"I can't do it, I'll get in trouble."

"You'll get in more than trouble denying a frontline soldier what he wants. Just do it, man—and make the raincoat the same size or larger."

Well, I never was the dude type, why begin now? In an attack we carried only bare essentials, our weapons, ammo, some rations, shovel, canteen, an overcoat if possible. Bedrolls and other non-essentials were left behind in the expectation that the kitchen truck would bring them up. These expectations were seldom realized and at night I converted my raincoat-covered overcoat into a sleeping bag. The

large coat collar encased my head to keep my ears warm. I clasped the bunched long sleeves with my hands and pulled my feet under the coat-tails.

The euphoria of receiving fresh clothes was diminished somewhat with finding neatly patched holes that had rendered the previous owner incapable of wearing them.

### Surprise on the Meuse

As the leading battalion of the assault regiments, us, we were trucked to Visé, Belgium, to practice river crossings in twelve-man assault boats in the swift current of the Meuse River.

The first night on the Meuse a runner from battalion headquarters arrived to request my presence. My sick dread immediately became sicker. I remembered my extra patrol duties on the Roer. When I arrived at headquarters, a colonel called me over and without a word handed me a phone. Numb and bewildered I heard a soft Alabama voice. "Emil, is it you?"

Well, scarcely, at least not the Emil she knew! It was Hattie! The conversation that followed never registered in my memory, but the upshot was that she had talked that nice Colonel Whomever into allowing her to visit me on the Meuse and could she do so tomorrow? I apparently said yes and we hung up. The colonel escorted me to the door.

"We'll bring her over in the morning. You'll be excused from the river crossing exercises but she can't stay overnight in your barracks. We'll pick her up at 1600 hours. Understood?"

His speech was clipped and clear as befitted a battalion commander and it was all I could do to mumble, "Yes sir." I left, still dazed, forgetting to salute.

A lieutenant brought her over the next morning after breakfast. He was a headquarters' jock—he in his neat, pressed uniform and me in my Charlie Chaplin oversized coat. Harriett rushed up to me, clasping me by my arms. (My hands, inches up my sleeve, were hard to come by.)

"Oh Emil, how wonderful to see you!"

"Hello, Harriett."

Lieutenant: "We'll pick you up in the afternoon, Miss Engelhardt. The Colonel wants you for dinner." (I'll bet he does!)

Exit the Lieut. His duty done he walked away briskly. I could smell his after-shave lotion. I felt a sudden flash of hate. It had been mandated that Red Cross girls could only date officers. I could tell by his manner that he heartily endorsed this edict and that I was a good case in point.

"Emil, you remember Col. X?" I shook my numbed head, no.

"At the country club dance on your furlough? He was a major then."

"Yes," I lied.

Hate had turned to shame at the shabby figure I was cutting. Then back to hate. Vanity, self-esteem, and other emotions welled up in me—personal feelings I had tried so desperately to erase over the months of combat. It didn't help to have Hattie turn to me and fumble up my sleeve for my hand. We were under the intense scrutiny of the kitchen squad.

Our bivouac was in some kind of institution, a school perhaps. Balustrades lined sunken gardens, and numerous stairways led to complicated garden walks. The gardens, now covered with snow, were flanked by buildings with doors leading off to who knew where. A typical European-style complex dating back to the Hapsburgs. It reminded me of a foreign film I once saw, *Last Year in Marienbad*. Ill-fated lovers moodily strolling around sunken gardens, holding hands and kissing, as we were doing in our own little cinema. Hattie, I had the feeling, was definitely free of her father's restrictions, that somewhere in her donut wagon travels she had let herself go and would dearly love to with me. But all the doors were either occupied with comings and goings or were locked—we did try a few. At any rate, if she was liberated and free of restrictions, I was still deeply bound by the war and heavy with the coming river crossing. With no private place to go, hugging tightly but feeling little warm contact through our heavy wool overcoats, we kissed and talked.

"Tell about your Red Cross wagon experiences, Hattie. . . ."

"I've kept up with your 29th Division all through Europe. Tell me. . . ."

Walking these cold wet paths with Hattie I tried desperately to be cheerful and loving, to lift myself out of the rigid protective casing I had molded against the war, to respond to Harriett's buoyant mood. She must have been deeply disappointed that there was not more there for me to give. I thought about that other gray wintry day at college, watching her walk down the slushy road to the village.

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Finally the troops came back, flashing quizzical looks at us as they marched by. We had lunch with them, and Harriett became more animated. She wrote me later, when I was in the hospital, that she was thrilled to see them all cleaning their rifles, knowing that we were going into combat in a few days. I wondered how she would have felt seeing them face down in the water or dismembered on the muddy banks.

The morning of February 23, in the Ninth Army crossing of the Roer, the 29th Division was to make the main effort. At our briefing we were told that there was to be a short but powerful artillery barrage at 2:45 A.M., followed by our crossing at 3:30 to assault the defenses on the high ground north of Jülich, just beyond the river.

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## Crossing the Roer

We trained in pontoon assault boats but crossed the Roer in Alligators—open amphibious tanks. The Roer River was perhaps as formidable a barrier as the Channel on D-Day. It was six to twelve feet deep with a current of some six miles per hour and about twelve hundred feet wide. The river banks were mined and had been flooded, and although the water had receded, I still sloshed over my shoes in icy water. Some of the men fell into deep holes. My pack was soaked and hung heavy on my back. My mortar, as usual, weighed a ton. We stood around waiting our turn to cross the river, quivering with the cold and fear. Around us was the usual hullabaloo—streams of tracer fire going in both directions, smoke and flares drifting down in various sections of the river, the splash-bang of mortar and artillery shells, the roar of Alligators.

As we grounded on the far shore, I jumped out in the soft mud and shouted for the Sarge to hand me the mortar. As I felt the bi-pod touch my hands I heard a hollow thump and the mortar dropped onto my chest. A stray bullet had hit Sarge in the head, and he fell back dead.

## The Enormous Black Flash

We were held up by a deep minefield and waited for passage to be cleared by the engineers. Come the dawn, there we were, the remaining mortar squad, standing around on the riverbank lamenting the loss of Sergeant Schwartz. In the grief that overwhelmed us, we had ignored the first principles of survival he had taught us—don't bunch up and, above all, dig in! Suddenly someone whistled an alarm call. On the brow of the hill a German 90mm self-propelled gun was slowly tracking us with its mile-long barrel.

It was as though, for flaunting the sacred survival formula, the Gods of war were giving us the almighty finger. Not every soldier gets to see the barrel of the cannon that nails him. I was too disgusted with myself to be frightened. As I turned my back to the gun and started a dive, a shell swished over my head, a huge Niagara of sound. With the smell of cordite I was engulfed in an enormous black flash. I came back to consciousness in a Paris hospital.

## Combat Fatigue

What was called "shell shock" in World War I was called "combat fatigue" or "battle exhaustion" in my war. The "fatigue" part was easy to understand. It is not the tiredness felt at the end of a hard day's work, but a state of utter exhaustion, difficult to describe or even to remember. When you live for months in a constant state of tension and fear (especially when you are in an experienced division like the 29th and know you won't be relieved until you are wounded or killed) and add

this exhaustion of the mind/spirit/ psyche to the physical, you end up in a condition of total disintegration. The horror of the experiences build up to where they become unbearable. I've seldom talked about this, with the feeling that it was too stressful and impossible to communicate. I read with interest numerous narrations in war books, but they failed to ring a bell.

The constant living with death, the sweet/sour smell from decaying bodies that hung over the battlefields, is with you day and night. It has been established that a man, any man, in any army, of any nationality, could tolerate about 150–200 days of modern combat before he starts to slide off his rocker. Combat divisions survive because they are constantly refreshed with new troops.

A mortar squad of five men is a family, a changing family since new replacements keep arriving. The senior member of the family, the lieutenant, was almost never in attendance, he was used to replace the frequent vacancies in the rifle platoons. Sergeant Schwartz was our true family head and mainstay. Even when he was out wounded we never received a replacement. When he was hit in October I was the oldest squad member and by November it was rumored that I was the last remaining man in the company without a purple heart. Replacements would come up and touch me for luck. It gave me goose pimples. What saved me from a breakdown was the hospital interlude I spent during the Bulge fighting.

Many happenings in combat accumulate in your brain, which stores them where memory can't reach them. Sodium pentathol was the pick the psychiatrists used to try and dig them out.

After a few days they operated on my shoulder with a local painkiller. I could watch them work in the overhead light reflector. Although I knew it wasn't a demanding job for them, I wished they would take it a little more seriously instead of joshing about dates. But the focus of my treatment was not that injury but my mental state, of which I was myself not fully aware until they took me out of the ward and put me into a private room—I apparently had a loud night life.

### **Count Backwards from One Hundred**

Every day I would wander down to the first floor for treatment. The Beaujon General Hospital was a giant, eleven-story, U-shaped building that took up three full sides of a block. I've read that for every five wounded soldiers, one died and another was a psychiatric casualty.

Sitting next to me on a corridor bench were soldiers who perpetually stared out into space. A young lieutenant kept telling me, in confidence, that he couldn't remember his name. My treatment was simple, mysterious, and never explained to me. As a shot of pentathol was being emptied into me:

“OK fellow, lie back and count backwards from one hundred.”

A very few counts and in no time, I was led out to my perch on the bench:

"Sit here until you feel like going back to your ward. See you tomorrow."

Sighting down the long hallway I would stagger off. "Hey Doc, whatever I told you has to be the truth, right?—So what did I say, eh?"

Writers write about the comradeship in the trenches in World War I. Did this apply to the isolation and loneliness of the World War II foxholes? The turnover in my division was so great and the pain of losing buddies so bitter that I tried to steel myself against allowing fellow soldiers to get too close. This was, unfortunately, not very successful with the exuberant Can —I see that heap of dark wet clothing in the middle of an empty road. As I cling to the side of an open tank, my feet in the cold mud of a hostile shore, I feel and hear the thump of that random bullet ending the life of Sergeant Schwartz. In the hospital I miss them both with a truly aching heart. And still do.

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### The Eisenhower Doctrine

Like U. S. Grant, it was Eisenhower's decision to fight a war of attrition. His orders were for continuous attack. He thought that since our manpower resources were greater than the Germans', and, if their losses were two times ours, victory would soon come. Like the Normandy hedgerow calculations this didn't happen. In the Bulge our casualties were 80,987, the German casualties 80,000 (higher in some estimates, but certainly far short of one to two). In general our losses were more like one to one, and we began to run out of available fighting bodies. By the end of Normandy the army had a shortfall of some 300,000 men.

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It was said that the 29th Division was in reality a corps, three divisions: one in combat, one in the hospital and one in the grave. Per unit of time, the 29th Division lost the second highest number of men in combat in the European theatre—20,324 out of 7,583 enlisted men and officers. In my time with "A" company we lost fifteen company commanders and so many lieutenants that we hardly had time to learn their names.

### *Editor's Note*

When he had recovered sufficiently to leave the hospital, but judged unfit for combat duty, Willimetz was assigned to the Signal Corps in May 1945 and eventually made his way to Austria, where he met his relatives. A year later he was sent home to New York. For years he struggled with his "combat fatigue" or post-traumatic stress disorder. Doctors were of no help. At last he determined to cure himself by sheer force of will. He married, and after a few years the symptoms gradually disappeared.

# Research Notes & Maryland Miscellany

## “That Eye Is Now Dim and Closed For Ever”: The Purported Image of Mary K. Goddard

CHRISTOPHER J. YOUNG

**S**urely, many researchers have known the sense of profound relief at being saved from embarrassment because they happened upon an important source at just the right moment. Imagine mine when I serendipitously encountered the illustration of Mrs. Anne Brunton Merry in the published journals of artist and playwright William Dunlap.<sup>1</sup> However, before relief and gratitude had set in, I first experienced a surreal sense of disillusionment. For a couple of years I had placed before me an image purported to be that of Mary K. Goddard, the printer of the *Maryland Journal* and deputy postmistress of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Baltimore, and the subject of an article I was then writing.<sup>2</sup> I kept her image before me in order to remind myself that I was writing about a person and not merely an idea that might come and go in historiographical fashion. So, when I came across the image of the actress, Anne Merry, I was relieved that I had discovered it on the eve of submitting the manuscript, but I also found it strange having to shift the mental meaning of the illustration.

In 1938 the able historian Joseph Towne Wheeler compiled a history of the press in Maryland for the years 1777 to 1790. That fine and important piece of work contains an illustration that Wheeler claimed to be the only known image of Mary K. Goddard. He claimed to have found it “pasted on the cover” of an almanac published by Mary Goddard in 1783.<sup>3</sup> Since the publication of Wheeler’s book, the illustration has been assumed in certain spheres of the historical profession to be that of Goddard.

Although the specific almanac that Wheeler viewed has not been located, it is

*Christopher Young’s article, “Mary K. Goddard: A Classical Republican in the Age of Revolution,” appeared in the spring 2001 issue of this journal.*



clear that the image is, indeed, that of the actress, Anne Brunton Merry, and not the printer-postmistress, Mary K. Goddard. Dunlap, the future miniaturist of Mrs. Merry, met the actress and her husband on September 29, 1797, in New York City. Before meeting her, Dunlap saw her perform.<sup>4</sup> He would later write in his history of the theatre that she was the “most perfect actress America has seen.”<sup>5</sup> When her poet-husband, Robert Merry, died in Baltimore in 1798, Dunlap offered the actress a permanent position at a New York theater. Although she declined the offer, she eventually agreed to several engagements in 1801. Dunlap hoped that the star’s appearances would boost ticket sales, and he was not disappointed.<sup>6</sup> The actress sat for Dunlap in Philadelphia at the end of 1805 or the beginning of 1806, not long after she had completed a successful season in Baltimore. The result of his efforts was soon engraved by David Edwin—the best-known engraver in the early United States—and became the frontispiece for volume one of William Dunlap’s *Dramatic Works*.<sup>7</sup>

In all likelihood, a fan of the actress cut out the published image of the stippled



engraving of America's most popular actress and pasted it onto the almanac. The almanac would have been at least twenty-three years old by the time the actress's image graced the cover. As anyone who has had the opportunity to look through them can attest, almanacs often doubled as diary-scrapbooks. So, it is not surprising that an illustration of the famed thespian found its way to an almanac, where it serves as a reminder that fanfare for performers has not been limited to the era of the silver screen.

Anne Brunton was born on May 30, 1769, in England. Her début as an actress occurred when she was just shy of her sixteenth year. "This was the most extraordinary evidence of genius I ever met with," a theatre manager later remembered. Not long afterward she was performing on the boards of the Covent Garden. She was an instant success in London and in the provinces. She retired from the stage in 1792, shortly after her marriage in 1791 to Robert Merry. There is disagreement as to the reason for her departure. Some believe that it was because Merry's family was disappointed and angered that he had married an actress. The actress's twentieth-century biographer believes that her premature retirement was due more to Robert's enthusiastic support for the French Revolution and subsequently the hostile political climate surrounding the Merrys.<sup>8</sup>

The Merrys then spent some time in revolutionary France before moving back to England. Because their financial situation had deteriorated, they eagerly accepted an offer by actor and theatre manager, Thomas Wignell. He offered Anne a position in his acting company, which was based in Philadelphia—the seat of the United States government at the time. This gave the Merrys not only an opportunity to improve their financial situation, but also an escape from the intense political climate in Britain during the mid-1790s. In October 1796 the Merrys landed in New York and embarked on their new life in the American Republic. On December 5, 1796, Anne made her American début in Philadelphia playing the part of Juliet. She charmed the audience with her voice and expressions. Her talent was immediately recognized and her reputation soared. The theatre company to which she belonged played regularly in Philadelphia and Baltimore, and at times performed in New York City.<sup>9</sup>

Anne Brunton married three times. Her first marriage was to Robert Merry in 1791. He died in 1798. In 1803 she married the man who recruited her in England and who offered her a new life in the United States, Thomas Wignell. Tragically, he died seven weeks later, but not before he had sired a child, Elizabeth Wignell, who would be the sole progeny of Anne. She then exchanged vows in 1806 in Baltimore with William Warren, a comedian who came to the United States at the same time Anne did and who was part of the same recruitment. Anne Merry Wignell made her first appearance as Mrs. Warren on the Baltimore stage on October 8, 1806. In 1808, while in her last trimester of pregnancy, Anne decided to make the arduous journey to Alexandria, Virginia, in order to join her husband. When the time

came to give birth, she was delivered of a stillborn child. Anne's health quickly declined. Four days later she was dead. One contemporary, lamenting the death of the actress, cried, the "eye is now dim and closed for ever which has so often communicated its magic influence to the heart; and mute is that tongue whose flexible and silver tones so sympathetically vibrated upon the ear of an enraptured audience."<sup>10</sup>

Her loss was a tragedy for her husband and all who knew her. She was America's beloved actress and gained respect from people of all social levels—a distinction not usually accorded to an actress during the late eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Although we will never know if Mary K. Goddard and Anne Brunton Merry ever met, it is likely that Goddard knew of the famous actress, for her abilities were applauded in Baltimore. As one critic declared, "He must be dead to every generous sentiment, and fine feeling of nature, who does not, after seeing her perform, retire from the theatre with improved sensibility, and a heart expanding with social virtue and affection." The Baltimorean hoped that for "many years may she, with unimpaired powers, receive the well earned plaudits of admiring Americans."<sup>12</sup> Besides making the town her home for part of the year, Anne performed regularly in Baltimore, and there is no doubt that Goddard had heard of her talent. Perhaps she even saw her perform and was one of many Americans who contributed to the kudos she enjoyed.

Some satisfaction has been gained by having learned the full story behind the image. Nonetheless, the truth, the discovery, can be bittersweet. Although grateful for being saved from a public blunder, the exchange for such a feeling is that the image of a lady who has occupied my mind for so long now fades into a vacuum that is vaguely outlined by an idea.

## NOTES

1. *Diary of William Dunlap (1766–1839): The Memoirs of a Dramatist, Theatrical Manager, Painter, Critic, Novelist, and Historian*, Vol. 1 (New York: New York Historical Society, 1931), xxxiv. The miniature faces page 150.
2. The article has since been published. Christopher J. Young, "Mary K. Goddard: A Classical Republican in a Revolutionary Age," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 96 (Spring 2001): 3–27.
3. Joseph Towne Wheeler, *The Maryland Press, 1777–1790* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1938), xiii. Illustration faces page 12.
4. *Diary of William Dunlap*, Vol. 1, September 29, 1797, 139, 144, 149, 150.
5. William Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, Vol. 1 (London, 1833), 334.
6. *Ibid.*, 2:111, 148; George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 2:118–120; Gresdna A. Doty, "Anne Brunton Merry," *American National Biography*, Vol. 15 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 369; Gresdna A. Doty, *The Career of Mrs. Anne Brunton Merry in the American Theatre* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 87.
7. Doty, *The Career of Mrs. Anne Brunton Merry*, 121; William Dunlap, *The Dramatic Works of*

William Dunlap, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: T. and G. Palmer, 1806); David McNeely Stauffer, *American Engravers Upon Copper and Steel*, Part I (New York: Grolier Club of the City of New York, 1907), 76–77; Mantle Fielding, *American Engravers Upon Copper and Steel* (Philadelphia, 1917), 14–15; Carl W. Drepperd, *Early American Prints* (New York: The Century Co., 1930). The oval miniature was done on ivory and it was set in a gold-gilt, pendant frame. See *Collection of Ivory Miniatures and Water Color Views in New York by Wm. Dunlap* (1905). According to the Smithsonian Institution Research Information System ([www.siris.si.edu](http://www.siris.si.edu)), three such miniatures of Anne Brunton Merry exist. Two are in New York City and one is in Baltimore.

8. John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1832), 2:42; J. A. C., "Robert Merry," *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959–60), 13:295–97; "Biographical Sketch of Mrs. Warren," *The Mirror of Taste and Dramatic Censor*, 1 (February 1810): 120, 128, 131–32; Doty, "Anne Brunton Merry," 368–69.

9. *Gazette of the United States*, December 7, 1796. In his history of the American Theatre, Dunlap judged Anne Merry as "perhaps the best representative of Juliet that was ever seen or heard." Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, 1:308; "Biographical Anecdotes of Mrs. Merry of the Theatre, Philadelphia," *The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine*, 1 (April 1798): 187; "Biographical Sketch of Mrs. Warren," *The Mirror of Taste*, 128–29, 130; Howard Paul and George Gebbie, eds., *The Stage and Its Stars*, Part 1, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Co., 1889), 13, 17; Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), 309.

10. Doty, *Career of Mrs. Anne Brunton Merry*, 127. Biographical Sketch of Mrs. Warren," *The Mirror of Taste*, 132–33; Oral Sumner Coad, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 12:574. Sylvanus Urban, "Obituary," *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle of the Year 1808* (London: John Nichols and Son, 1808), 78:749. The obituary originally appeared (with slight differences) in Philadelphia's *Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, July 8, 1808. See Doty, *Career of Mrs. Anne Brunton Merry*, 138, n64.

11. "Biographical Anecdotes of Mrs. Merry," *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine*, 187; "Obituary," *Gentleman's Magazine*, 749.

12. *Baltimore American*, November 22, 1805, quoted in Doty, *Career of Mrs. Anne Brunton Merry*, 122.

# Maryland History Bibliography, 2000: A Selected List

ANNE S. K. TURKOS AND JEFF KORMAN, Compilers

From 1975 on, the *Maryland Historical Magazine* has published regular compilations of books, articles, and doctoral dissertations relating to Maryland history. The following list includes materials published during 2000, as well as earlier works that have been brought to our attention. Bibliographers must live with the fact that their work is never finished. Please notify us of any significant omissions so that they may be included in the next list. Send additional items to: Anne S. K. Turkos, Archives and Manuscripts Department, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

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## Book Reviews

*The Baltimore Rowhouse.* By Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Balfoure. (New York: The Princeton Architectural Press, 1999. Illustrations, bibliography, index. 17.95 paper.)

Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Balfoure introduce their book *The Baltimore Rowhouse* by observing that “from any vista, Baltimore overwhelms the viewer with tens of thousands of row houses . . . forming endlessly repeated miles of look alike houses.” But, in what turns out to also be analogous to the experience of reading their book (and probably the inspiration for it), they continue that, “yet a walk along the same streets, with an alert eye, reveals that there is more to rowhouses than repetition” (2). And indeed there is, as they proceed to demonstrate in a richly layered history in which they detail a new understanding of the evolution of the row house as urban vernacular architecture and use the building to tell the story of the development of Baltimore in the context of the national urban and suburban history.

Like the rowhouse it analyzes, the book presents a deceptively simple appearance. A three word title, *The Baltimore Rowhouse*, on the title page is followed by a table of contents of five chapters with short titles: “The Walking City: 1790–1855,” “The Italianate Period: 1850–1890,” “The Artistic Period: 1875–1915,” “The Daylight Rowhouse: 1915–1955,” and “The Rowhouse Returns: 1970s–1990s.” Believing that American rowhousing has been ignored by most scholars because it was “considered merely a mundane building form,” the authors set out to correct that omission in American urban history by considering the rowhouse in the context of the residential development process, a subject they also conclude is missing from most urban histories.

The coauthors are well qualified to study the rowhouse and the historic residential development process in Baltimore. Mary Ellen Hayward directs the Maryland Historic Trust’s Alley House project, which studies this threatened architectural and cultural resource. Charles Balfoure is an architect specializing in preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings. The residential development process starts with acquiring land and ends with the construction and sale of the residence. Seeing the rowhouse as its end-product, the authors examine this process in great detail. The book examines “builders’ records and land records transactions to explain how this real estate process evolved from small-scale builders, building a few houses at a time in the early nineteenth century, to large-scale building developers, with access to large amounts of capital and land, filling whole tracts in the twentieth century” (3).

The central theme of the book is how the rowhouse dominated Baltimore's housing supply not only in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century but also well into the twentieth century. No one else has documented this so clearly. Nearly all Baltimoreans lived in rowhouses with those for the "wealthy architect-designed; those for everybody else were built on speculation . . . and designed by the builders themselves." Rowhouses remained the housing of choice for so long because they were a surprisingly plastic commodity constantly modified by builders and developers to reflect changes in tastes and technology in housing with "modifications to cornice designs, window treatments, and the brick façade itself, adding bay windows, peaked roofs, stick style porches, and carved or molded embellishments." Each chapter details the residential development history of the period it addresses: how the market was changing, how builders met the market, where new development occurred along with detailed descriptions and drawings of the architecture of the evolving rowhouse. In tracing this, they move from the Federal and Greek Revival styles of the walking city from 1790 to 1855, to the Italianate style from 1850 to 1890, to the Queen Anne and Picturesque Styles of what Hayward and Balfoure call the Artistic Period from 1875 to 1915.

All of this is extremely well done and, for this urbanist, almost spellbinding. Yet, when the authors begin to consider the twentieth century in "The Daylight Rowhouse: 1915–1955," *Rowhouse* takes on a new and significant dimension. In their introduction, Hayward and Balfoure credit urban historian Sam Bass Warner and his seminal book *Streetcar Suburbs* (1962) as being one of the "first American scholars to investigate an aspect of the urban development process" which was with the growth of the "first suburbs that ringed Boston." Yet their book continues Warner's work not just on the historic residential development process but on the suburban process as well. Indeed, an alternate title to the book might be "Rowhouse Suburbs." Although residential developments of single-family houses on the edge of the city is the form most associated with the suburbs, such as the prototypical Roland Park in Baltimore, the subdivisions are but the ultimate form of the desire of city dwellers to be separate from the city in an individual house on its own lot. But city dwellers who could not afford this found other ways to express their desire for separation architecturally as witnessed by early twentieth-century bungalow suburbs of tiny cottages on sliver lots or the triple-decker suburbs of Boston about which Warner writes. The authors of *Rowhouse* add yet another previously little known building type reflecting the desire to surburbanize in the urban context—the "Daylight Rowhouse." Designed by rowhouse builders as a response to suburban cottages with which they were competing, the "Daylight Rowhouse" was introduced in 1913. "Nearly every room . . . has a window, which was achieved by widening the standard 12-foot-to 16-foot-wide rowhouse and creating a two-room-wide, two-room-deep floor plan" (130). Built at the end of streetcar lines beyond the city limits, these shallow, modestly priced Daylight rowhouses provided other

suburban amenities such as a small front yard and room for a garage in the rear. The "Daylight Rowhouse" ranks as a real discovery of transitional housing type in the history of urban and suburban housing.

*The Baltimore Rowhouse* meets all of the goals that the authors set out for it and then, in this reviewer's opinion, exceeds them, as Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Balfoure have made a new and significant contribution not only to our understanding of the rowhouse and the residential development process but to the history of suburbanization in the United States.

DAVID L. AMES

*University of Delaware*

*An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean.* By Andrew Jackson O'Shaugnessy. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000. 373 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50, paper.)

It is hard to find new and important things to say about the American Revolution, but Andrew O'Shaugnessy has done just that. In *An Empire Divided* he begins from an obvious proposition—that the thirteen colonies that rebelled in 1776 were barely half of all British colonies in the Americas—and proceeds to chronicle why the British West Indian colonies stayed loyal to Britain. In addition, he analyzes what happened to these colonies in the ensuing Revolutionary conflict. Until now no-one has written an account that encompassed both the advent of the Revolution and the Revolution itself as it concerned the British West Indies. Given that, as Piers Mackesy wrote in his authoritative study of the British war for America, the Revolutionary war was largely fought and decided in the Caribbean, we must be thankful that we now have a first-rate study of this topic.

O'Shaugnessy's book is immensely important. All students of the Revolution should read, if only to be made aware of how the Revolution was very much more than just an event concerning North American colonists. O'Shaugnessy makes clear that West Indian indifference to American grievances in the 1760s and 1770s helped to convince British politicians that their actions toward North America were justified. The British government saw the West Indian islands and the thirteen colonies as one polity. They persisted in their calamitous policies toward British North America in large part because they assumed that what worked in Jamaica and Barbados—the wealthiest and hence most important colonies in the Empire—was bound to work in Maryland and Massachusetts. O'Shaugnessy also shows how crucial it was that the British West Indies did not join the rebellion. The rebellious colonists were desperate for the West Indians to join them. Their absence made the patriot cause even more seemingly helpless than it already was. It meant also that the two regions, which had been becoming increasingly integrated in the decades before the Revolution, were artificially split apart, with immense

long-term consequences, particularly for the slave states of the new nation. But the short-term consequences were also significant. Ironically, the American rebels benefited greatly from the West Indian colonies staying loyal to Britain, despite their efforts to get their support. Britain was forced to divert valuable resources away from the war in North America in order to protect its wealthy but vulnerable possessions. After France entered the war in 1778, the British Caribbean became as least as important a military theatre, especially at sea, as North America. Britain had to fight the war on two fronts, severely diminishing its capacity to overcome American rebels. O'Shaugnessy demonstrates that the road to Yorktown ran through the eastern Caribbean. He shows that we cannot understand American victory without taking into account the primacy of the Caribbean in British thinking—the defense of Jamaica, for example, was more important than anything save the protection of Britain itself. Consequently, the British feared being dispossessed of their West Indian possessions by the strong French navy even more than they lamented the loss of the thirteen American colonies. O'Shaugnessy explains how Britain came very close to losing the West Indies along with British North America, with Admiral George Rodney being largely responsible for the preservation of the former and being culpable for the loss of the latter.

I do not agree with all of O'Shaugnessy's conclusions. I think he overstates the importance of absenteeism. I am not convinced that white West Indians were cowed into obedience by their precarious position as a heavily outnumbered minority among hostile African slaves. Fear of slave resistance had never stopped West Indian intransigence before. The explanation of why the West Indians did not rebel seem to me to be more to do with their lack of sympathy for the American cause than with their appreciation of their physical and financial dependence on Britain. Much of O'Shaugnessy's evidence in fact points to this conclusion. But overall this book is a marvelous achievement. Copiously illustrated, handsomely published, beautifully written, and, most importantly, convincingly argued, *An Empire Divided* succeeds in its major objective of proving that colonial and revolutionary American history makes no sense if the Caribbean is not included. O'Shaugnessy teaches us that we still have much to learn about the Revolution. He insists that we have to treat the Revolution within a British Atlantic as well as an American context. Both American and Caribbean history will be the richer if his insights are given the attention that they richly deserve.

TREVOR BURNARD  
Brunel University

*The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1880s.* By Bertram Wyatt-Brown. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. 431 pages. Appendix, notes, index. \$19.95 paper.)

In 1982, Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor* reshaped our historical understanding of the antebellum South by illuminating the role that ideas of honor and shame played in the culture and ethics of the planter elite. Almost twenty years later, Wyatt-Brown is back on familiar territory with this collection of interrelated essays. *The Shaping of Southern Culture* does not break new historiographical ground in the ways that *Southern Honor* did, but it does elegantly and informatively deepen our understanding of the place of honor in southern society. To this end Wyatt-Brown organizes his essays, the majority of which have been previously published in some form, around three themes: the relationship between honor and politics, the place of evangelical Christianity in southern life (and the tensions between honor and religion), and the impact of sectionalism, war, and defeat on southern identity. To this I would add a fourth theme that cuts across Wyatt-Brown's sections—the significance of depression or melancholy as a driving force in the public and private lives of many members of the nineteenth-century southern elite.

In many respects *The Shaping of Southern Culture* works best as a companion piece to *Southern Honor*. Wyatt-Brown casts the same broad methodological net as he did earlier, relying on a combination of traditional newspapers and manuscripts, literary sources (especially memoirs and novels written during the first part of the twentieth century), anthropological theory, and comparisons across space and time. The essays that work best are those that address the shortcomings of *Southern Honor* and take two decades of scholarship (which Wyatt-Brown very helpfully analyzes in an appendix) into account. His essay on "Andrew Jackson's Honor" puts the familiar story of Jackson's 1806 duel into a broader political context of quasi-military patron-client relationships throughout the Early Republic. The pieces on religion, united under the heading of "Grace," provide an important corrective to earlier omissions in Wyatt-Brown's work, and link honor, evangelical Christianity, and slaveholding ideology together into a cultural world.

The book's final essay, the never before published "Honor Redeemed in Blood," is the finest in the book. Historians are familiar with the relationships between resurgent southern white political power, disfranchisement of African Americans, the Lost Cause and the rise of racial lynchings in the 1880s and 1890s. To this volatile mix Wyatt-Brown adds honor in the form of the last few major duels fought in the nineteenth-century South. Indeed, Wyatt-Brown claims that the passing of the old cultural order of honor and ritual, as exemplified in these elite duels, gave way to the public, cross-class violence of lynchings. But both forms of extralegal punishment were motivated by the same impulses: defense of family and community honor, and upholding the "sacredness of white womanhood" (284–85).



Just as Wyatt-Brown relied on a similar methodology in this book and *Southern Honor*, so too does it suffer from some of the same shortcomings. The most striking is Wyatt-Brown's enduringly limited view of what constitutes southern culture. Specifically, his southern culture is white, male, and largely elite. He includes one chapter about ideals of honor among slave men, but it is one of the weaker ones, relying to a large extent on older paradigms. Wyatt-Brown is not unaware of the narrowness of his argument, but makes "no apology for choosing this course." His defense, however, is a curious one: "*The Shaping of Southern Culture* is almost exclusively concerned with the world of public performance, where men took the dominant roles" (xviii). Be that as it may, well over a decade of scholarship (of which Wyatt-Brown's notes and appendix demonstrate his awareness) has shown the importance of white women in public culture in the antebellum and wartime South. Wyatt-Brown's decision to ignore fully half of the white population, and almost all of the African American one mars this otherwise thorough and fascinating book.

ANNE SARAH RUBIN

*University of Maryland, Baltimore County*

*Joshua Barney: Hero of the Revolution and 1812.* By Louis Arthur Norton. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000. 264 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95 cloth.)

This new biography of Commodore Joshua Barney is aptly named. Barney, born on Bear Creek in present-day Dundalk, Baltimore County, is a genuine hero of the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Louis Arthur Norton recounts Barney's life at sea competently but handles non-maritime aspects less well. As have other biographers of the commodore, he has quite appropriately mined Mary Barney's 1832 biography of her late husband. The author's account is also enlivened with quotes from the commander's letters and from the logs of his voyages.

Beginning in early 1813, the British Royal Navy began to treat the Chesapeake Bay as a private lake, a situation that grieved and upset Barney who had been based at his farm at Elkridge since his return from a lucrative voyage on board the privateer *Rossie* in the opening months of the War of 1812. On July 4, 1813, Barney wrote to Secretary of the Navy William Jones and made a suggestion to take offensive action against the British using a flotilla of small vessels comprising gunboats and row galleys. The British meanwhile established a permanent base on Tangier Island, Virginia, called "Fort Albion." It was to attack this base that Barney, newly appointed to the rank of captain in the U.S. Navy, set sail from Baltimore in his flotilla of eighteen small vessels in late May 1814. Norton, however, mistakenly states that the objective of the attack was Watts Island, an island that had been occupied by the British the year before but was not the location of their main base by this date.

The British penned Barney's small fleet into St. Leonard's Creek, a tributary of the Patuxent, which would witness two naval battles in June. Norton makes some errors in describing the forces that supported Barney on the Patuxent. He states, "Among the militia units assigned to guard [Barney's] men was the 36th Regiment under the command of Col. Henry Carberry" (174). Carberry's troops were men of the 36th Regiment of the U.S. Army. Also in support of Barney, Norton says, "was an artillery battery, under the command of another militiaman, Col. Decius Wadsworth" (176). Wadsworth was in fact a colonel in the U.S. Army Corps of Ordnance, and it was he who suggested the plan that enabled Barney to escape from the British trap. The army man mounted cannons on the northern bluff overlooking the creek. Although the Americans failed to coordinate their attack on the British blockading squadron, with the artillery barrage beginning before Barney could descend the creek, the confusion and damage caused by the American artillery did enable the flotilla to escape up river toward Benedict. Norton mentions Barney's escape but fails to give Wadsworth credit for the plan. Possibly if he had realized Wadsworth was a U.S. Army man instead of a militia officer due credit might have been given!

Wadsworth later performed well at Bladensburg in commanding a battery defending the bridge over the eastern branch of the Potomac (now the Anacostia River), which Norton fails to mention in his description of the August 24 battle. He cites British observer Lieutenant George R. Gleig's oft-quoted but untrue statement that "no troops could not have behaved worse" than the Americans defending the bridge and that the only fighting was done by Barney's sailors among the American army of some six thousand mainly militia under Brig. Gen. William H. Winder (181–82). Proving Gleig's account inaccurate is that the British sustained heavy casualties at the bridge before they got anywhere near Barney, who was positioned over a mile farther west near the gates of today's Fort Lincoln Cemetery. Barney's bravery is undeniable and his part in the battle, including his serious wounding, is well described by the author.

The author states incorrectly that the British marched into Washington on "August 25. . . one day after the Battle of Bladensburg" (183). In fact they marched into the city the same day as the battle and approached the U.S. Capitol (which they would soon burn) around 8:00 P.M. Other erroneous information given by Norton is that British General Ross's four thousand-some invading force included "the Chasseurs Britanniques, a foreign legion of non-Britons without specific loyalties; a group of convicts; and some Spanish mercenaries" (184). It is true that the British employed a year earlier in June 1813, during the attacks on Norfolk and Hampton, Virginia, a foreign corps made up of former French prisoners of war variously called "Chasseurs Britanniques" or (misleadingly) "Canadian Chasseurs" who went on a notorious rampage in Hampton. However, such troops were not among the British force at Washington. If the rogues Norton mentions had been

with Ross, probably the sack of the nation's capital would have been more complete. Instead, in the main, private property was spared and non-military personnel respected.

Commodore Barney deserves an accurate modern biography. Louis Arthur Norton's account of the life of the naval commander fails to fulfill that promise.

CHRISTOPHER T. GEORGE

Baltimore

*America's Jubilee: How in 1826 a Generation Remembered Fifty Years of Independence.* By Andrew Burstein. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 375 pages. Notes, index, maps, illustrations. \$30.)

In *American Jubilee*, Andrew Burstein has focused on a particularly rich year of early American history, 1826, when the nation celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Burstein correctly sees a generational shift in the nation's political leadership as younger men like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster assumed the reins from venerable founding fathers like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. No longer would the nation's leaders be drawn from veterans of the revolutionary and republican struggles, and Burstein sees the 1826 Jubilee as an opportunity for the new guard to salute and embrace the achievements of their forebears. Adding an almost supernatural quality to an already hallowed occasion, both Adams and Jefferson died on the celebratory day they helped to create. In his introduction, Burstein poses two questions his book intends to answer: "What were the American people trying to retrieve or restore as they celebrated on July 4, 1826? And what did the Jubilee mean to them?" (7). Most of all, Burstein wants readers to see the 1820s as more than just a stopover between the presidencies of Jefferson and Jackson.

Rather than tackling these questions directly, Burstein devotes a single chapter to the lives of nine people he considers integral to producing the mixture of old and new that characterized the Jubilee celebration. His first three chapters focus on two men and a woman who helped to revive the revolutionary spirit that eventually culminated in the Jubilee. Chapter one concerns the Marquis de Lafayette, a revolutionary hero who staged a triumphant tour of the United States in 1824 and 1825. According to Burstein, Lafayette's visit prepared the nation for the 1826 festivities. William Wirt, President James Monroe's attorney general, earns a chapter for his efforts to honor the nation's past in his biography of fellow Virginian and fiery patriot, Patrick Henry, published in 1817. Chapter three concerns Eliza Foster, a fiction writer who used her novels to celebrate the revolution. In *Yorktown: An Historical Romance*, published in 1826, Foster wrote a romantic account of Lafayette's heroism during the American Revolution.

In subsequent chapters, Burstein presents the political leaders, the issues and

even the artistic style that he believes embodied the second generation of Americans. The political leaders are John Quincy Adams, president during the Jubilee and the son of John Adams, as well as Andrew Jackson, Adams's successor and the symbol of frontier democracy. The politics of the 1820s are represented by Ethan Allen Brown of Ohio and his advocacy of the Ohio-Erie Canal, and Congressman George McDuffie of South Carolina who sought to eliminate the electoral college and achieve the direct election of the president. Burstein's final noteworthy is Ruth Bascom, a painter and the wife of a Massachusetts minister. Bascom produced profile portraits incorporating a more romantic style that marked a shift from the Revolutionary period.

While these biographical chapters are interesting and well-written, they merely scratch the surface of the issues surrounding the Jubilee of 1826. Why did the post-Revolutionary generation favor a romantic style? Why did Ohio symbolize the road West better than any other place? What little analysis he does provide consists of hollow phrases such as "We serve our present by reporting on an unfamiliar state of mind, and by attempting to do so judiciously" (33). Instead of analyzing how these lives related to his larger questions, Burstein is content to provide biographical summaries that merely locate these individuals in 1826 without breaking any new ground in our understanding of these people or their times.

His final chapters concerning the Jubilee and the deaths of Adams and Jefferson represent more of the same as Burstein fails to tackle the issues that are central to his study. While both chapters contain interesting detail about the celebrations occurring across the nation as well as the late-life friendship that blossomed between Jefferson and Adams, the meaning and importance of the Jubilee remains unexplored.

The decade beginning with President Monroe's northern tour in 1817 and ending with the nation's Jubilee in 1826 marked an important rite of passage as a younger generation of Americans celebrated and saluted the nation's revolutionary heroes and its republican values. Not only did Lafayette tour the nation during this period, but also the Plymouth Rock and Bunker Hill monuments were dedicated in 1820 and 1825 respectively. Despite its promising premise, Burstein's book ultimately disappoints. Missing from *American Jubilee* is the probing analysis that these events and this decade deserve. While this study is well-written and accessible, readers will have to look elsewhere to understand what the celebration of 1826 meant to a youthful nation as it inherited its rich legacy.

SANDY MOATS  
UCLA

*Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America.* By Edward J. Balleisen. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. 337 pages. Notes, index. \$19.95 paper.)

In this impressive work, Edward J. Balleisen explores the world of failure for commercially minded individuals. While he includes anecdotes from across the country, Balleisen focuses on southern New York and in particular those who petitioned for relief under the Bankruptcy Act of 1841. Working within the historical context of an ongoing market revolution and the evolving nature of capitalism, Balleisen analyzes how people failed, how some succumbed to failure, and how others recovered. More than explaining the varied paths to financial insolvency and the obstacles and avenues to recovery, Balleisen's work provides in-depth and sharp analysis of long-term consequences for the nineteenth century. He concludes that in their attempts to navigate failure, commercially oriented individuals developed legal and social resources to manage financial ruin, reworked capitalism to benefit their reduced status, and found less risky employment within a new, salaried, middle class.

Using a tremendous amount of primary research, Balleisen confidently handles the nuances failure presented within a market society and culture. Individuals failed due to the inherent risks of credit, increased competition, inexperience, bad record-keeping, and flawed personal choice. Family and business networks could cause failure through assuming familial debts or cosigning for an insolvent partner. These same connections assisted in recovery with credit extensions and professional referrals for new projects. The honored social and cultural status of "independence" was a primary factor for the stigma of failure and the desperate attempts to reclaim lost wealth. Independence was the heart of the success ethic, but ironically, reaching and maintaining this position depended on having access to credit, investors, and reputable commercial associates. Even though they rarely recognized this irony, failures attempted to cover their financial ruin to avoid losing social status and access to the credit necessary to recover. In their quest for lost property and prestige, they often relied on the same flawed judgement and habits that led to their insolvency. Balleisen's look at the causes of bankruptcy and attempts to overcome it reveals the personal, social, and cultural agony that failures experienced in their quest for financial independence.

Despite exploring an expansive range of conditions, reactions, and dilemmas surrounding failure, Balleisen does not fully address the ambiguity between the importance contemporaries placed on character and the failure of upstanding individuals. He addresses the important relationship between commercial moralists and the formation of legal mandates regarding proper behavior for creditors and debtors. But the same messages about obligations and conduct also contributed to the confusion and contradictions surrounding failure. Popular moral teach-

ings argued that character was an integral aspect of the success ethic. Qualities such as perseverance, temperance, industry, and honesty allowed people to turn opportunities into profitable gains, enabling them to fulfill financial contracts. When they found themselves unable to honor commitments, failures faced blame that their reduced position resulted from character flaws such as drinking, laziness, dishonesty, or recklessness. However, those who supposedly possessed the necessary character traits for success failed right along with those deemed as swindlers, cheats, or confidence men. The failure of an upstanding and hard-working individual was a frightening scenario and one of the more mystifying sides of failure.

The book's strongest features are the sections addressing how failures reworked capitalism. Failures petitioning for relief were fully acquainted with the procedures involved and often took jobs as clerks, assistants, and aids in the expanding profession of bankruptcy law associated with relief actions. Under this system of "vulture capitalism," individuals stumbled onto new avenues to recovery and learned how to reorder capitalism to include the business of "wrecking." Too often historians look at such activity as the generic and over-used examples of resistance and accommodation to market forces. Balleisen handily shows how failures rationally made capitalism work for them rather than simply adjust to a new order.

Insolvents recovering from failure also took subordinate positions in business firms as an alternative route to success and became a new middle class of salaried employees. One cannot help but suspect that there were other facets of changing business culture that contributed to the rise of salaried positions. Business networks grew in terms of sophistication and geographical expansion thus creating a need for lower-level positions such as clerks and varying types of agents to assist business owners. However, Balleisen's connecting such employment to failure is an intriguing conclusion. His analysis of independence within this change is particularly innovative. Despite some initial embarrassment at their lesser positions, salaried workers presented a new portrait of independence different from either the nostalgic yeoman farmer or entrepreneur. Instead, they defined independence and self-reliance as the security gained from being a salaried employee. Salaried positions, they argued, liberated them from debts and risks associated with individual ownership of commercial businesses. In effect they proclaimed themselves to be a new version of the solid republican citizen. The gradual acceptance of these white-collar jobs demonstrated the continued commitment to the success ethic. It also helped lay the base for big business and the paper-pushing middle class usually associated with the Gilded Age.

Balleisen's work is a serious contribution to the scholarly literature on nineteenth-century America. He explores the importance of failure, an aspect usually lost amidst attention given to success and the creation of the self-made man. He also provides a provocative view of how failure impacted the development of a

more sophisticated capitalist system and a distinct middle class. Yet, Balleisen's work has larger implications for the historical discipline. The Bankruptcy Act of 1841 followed in the wake of the Panic of 1837, and even though failures happened at any time, the bulk of relief petitioners suffered during this depression. Balleisen proves that an economic crisis can be investigated as a cultural case study rather than analyzed through price comparisons, stock ratios, and currency fluctuations. Showing a great deal of creativity and balance, Balleisen links aspects of cultural and social history, two disciplines often at odds with each other. He correctly recognizes that failure cannot be quantified with endless charts of data and percentages, but still locates the social impact of this cultural dilemma in the class system. Even though his work gives more attention to New York, it would be beneficial to students of Maryland and the Chesapeake region. The trauma of failure touched a wide range of individuals and certainly affected commercially minded citizens in and around Baltimore and the mid-Atlantic. Regardless of one's geographical interest, this work is a well-written and highly enjoyable account of an important, but often overlooked, aspect of nineteenth-century America.

SARAH KIDD

*University of Missouri*

*Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era.* By Laura F. Edwards. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 281 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$29.95.)

Laura Edwards's *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore* is an ambitious and largely successful attempt to synthesize the experiences of southern women, white and black, from the last years of the antebellum period through Reconstruction. The volume covers the experiences of women in the core of the Confederacy, specifically excluding the "middle ground" of Maryland, Kentucky, Delaware, and Missouri (7). Nevertheless, her insights into women's lived experience are particularly valuable for the framework that they establish. Edwards, an associate professor of history at UCLA and author of *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), combines fascinating vignettes drawn from primary sources with a comprehensive reading of the relevant secondary literature to present an informative picture of women's lives. Readers familiar with the research on women and gender in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras may find some of Edwards's generalizations frustrating, but the explosion of research on women's lives during this period would render any synthesis difficult. By incorporating the experiences of poor and middling women, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore* moves beyond the established dichotomy between wealthy white and enslaved black women's experience that has shaped standard interpretations.

The organization of the volume is straightforward: Edwards follows three groups of women—wealthy white women, poor to middling white women, and African American women in slavery and freedom—before, during, and after the Civil War. Popular images of southern women before the Civil War, she writes, are still shaped by the “myth of moonlight and magnolias” whose “seductive scent” and “soft focus tend to obscure the diversity of southern women and to blur the sharp edges of their lives” (10). Plantation society was often fraught with personal uncertainties for white women despite class privilege. While benefiting from the labor of enslaved African Americans, plantation wives were also subject to the authority of their husbands who could squander unprotected assets brought into the marriage and even beat or rape them with near perfect impunity. Other women—poorer whites and free blacks—struggled for autonomy within the planters’ world. Perhaps the most valuable and original contribution of *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* is its exploration of these women’s lives, filled as they were with hard work largely unrecognized by historians. Edwards’s description of slave women’s lives, in contrast, draws upon a rich literature by such scholars as Deborah Gray White, Jacqueline Jones, Herbert Gutman, Brenda Stevenson, and Leslie Schwalm. Nonetheless, Edwards uses the well-known story of Harriet Jacobs to bring out salient features of slave women’s experience and resistance to the “peculiar institution.”

For wealthy white women, the Civil War eroded the social distinctions in planter society, thrust women into unaccustomed roles as plantation overseers, and diminished their ability to distinguish themselves from poorer white women. “The sacrifice that even the most die-hard among them were the least willing to make was the surrender of their social standing—their place as women in the slaveholding class at the pinnacle of white southern society” (82). As the war drew to a close, planter women reacted with disbelief, then dismay. The war made the lives of poorer white women and free black women still more precarious. A dramatic letter sent to the governor of North Carolina in 1864 summarized the daily brutality the war inflicted even on the home front: “it is impossible to whip they Yankees, therefor I beg you for God sake to try and make peace on some terms and let they rest of they poor men come home and try to make something to eat, my husband has been killed, and if they all stay till they are dead, what in they name of God will become of us poor women and children” (85). As the war dragged on, many white women outside the planter class became increasingly vocal in their demand that husbands, brothers, and sons be returned to plow the fields and reap the meager harvests. When their pleas fell upon deaf ears, they encouraged desertion, bought and sold in the underground economy, and led bread riots. Edwards wisely observes that many of these women rejected “both the war and the Confederacy” (98). For slave women, the Civil War at first brought privation and then freedom. Like Barbara Fields in her path-breaking volume on emancipation in



Maryland, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), Edwards emphasizes the self-emancipation of enslaved women and men, a process well underway when Abraham Lincoln promulgated the Emancipation Proclamation.

In her final section on Reconstruction, Edwards suddenly discusses freedwomen first, and planter women last, as if to emphasize the radical change in southern society wrought by emancipation. Certainly the experiences of ex-slaves support her argument that, "just as the wartime policies inevitably politicized the 'home front,' so Reconstruction-era policies politicized the household" (120). As sharecropping emerged as the bitter compromise between former slaves and masters, newly "redeemed" state legislatures enacted "black codes" to restrict the autonomy of African American families. Former masters were particularly outraged that most black women refused to work for them any longer, preferring instead to work in their own homes and on their own fields. Ordinary white women, often "invisible" in the histories, were trapped between worlds (149). Some came to support the Republican Party while others embraced white supremacy. Nearly all were dragged into the wage economies of the New South. Planter women, many of whom lost family fortunes in the war, emerged from Reconstruction embittered about the past but hopeful for a future in which an elegant domesticity would restore their status.

Edwards concludes with a plea for a more realistic vision of southern history, one in which the experiences of ordinary women play a greater role. "Perhaps," she writes, "these legacies can replace the haze of moonlight and magnolias that now serves to soften the pain and violence of this region's past. Perhaps, then, we can begin using southern history in more productive ways" (189). Thirty years after the Civil War ended, the daughter of a Confederate general published *Lee's Primary School History of the United States* (Richmond, Va.: B.F. Johnson Publishing, Co., 1897). Susan Pendleton Lee published several similar histories, which were used in southern schools to counter northern textbooks. Not surprisingly, Lee's narrative excoriated emancipation and former slaves who "quit their homes and their work and flocked to the Northern camps to be fed and maintained in idleness" (204). Particularly strong invective was directed at the Freedmen's Bureau, which "gave to the Negroes, in many cases, land of their former owners, and encouraged them in every way to be rude and insolent and idle" (232). That the fiction of land redistribution and the racist myth of black idleness appear in a southern history should not be surprising. What is remarkable, however, is that this imagined history was accepted throughout the North. Already the pernicious lie of African Americans living in idleness supported by the federal government had taken root.

Edwards convincingly argues that southern histories that elide women's experiences cannot possibly explain how the Civil War and Reconstruction unfold.

The geographic scope of the study, however, imposes a sameness upon the varied experiences of southern women that she does not intend. By exploring women's experiences in three dimensions Edwards provides a better way of understanding southern women's history, but further research must explore the variation within the South. While it is probably axiomatic to the readers of this journal that any history would be better with Maryland included, there are indeed substantive reasons for greater scrutiny of the border states. An analysis of women's lives in the border states and beyond might suggest continuities in women's experiences of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The ease with which southern perceptions of sectionalism and race were accepted in the North suggests that perhaps it is the "pain and violence" of this *nation's* past that must finally be laid to rest.

ROBERT S. WOLFF

Central Connecticut State University

*Singing in the New Nation: How Music Shaped the Confederacy, 1861–1865.* By E. Lawrence Abel. (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2000. 416 pages. Appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

E. Lawrence Abel's thorough and comprehensive work focuses on a relatively narrow topic—the music reflecting one side of a nation-rending conflict. The special circumstances and limitations of the Confederacy merit such a study, and the author goes well beyond the music and lyrics, as he should. Political ideology, personal values, cultural symbols, and historical background help place songs (many of them familiar) into a meaningful cultural context. Here lies the central strength of this book—and it opens the door to a certain weakness. When summarizing related areas of study, the author's command of facts is at times overextended. This shortcoming is minor in view of the book's overall contribution, though.

Abel has organized *Singing the Nation* quite functionally into three parts: 1) music as a direct reflection of Confederate ideals; 2) music made by the soldiers, including signal calls, band music, and songs/dance tunes of practical use; and, 3) the Confederate music industry. Within each part the clear chapter headings are helpful, as some readers no doubt will prefer to skip to topics of interest rather than wade through the heavily cited text from start to finish (1,080 footnotes, and 575 bibliographic entries). Such rigorous citations define this as a scholarly book and one that can be useful to other specialists within the field who choose to follow the author's research trail.

The meat of this work lies in an intermingling of direct quotations, song lyrics, background information, statistics, and analysis. Biographies of colorful figures, such as Harry Macarthy (author of "The Bonnie Blue Flag"), go well beyond what is normally found in books on Civil War music. The author peppers his factual

presentation with illustrative stories that also add charm, many deriving from late nineteenth-century anecdotal “reminiscences.” Some stories come off as hyperbole; they may bring a smile but they do not always sit well in light of the book’s scholarly basis. Some statements derived from secondary scholarly sources are simply wrong, such as the assertion that in eighteenth-century America only “gentlemen” amateurs owned and played (wooden) musical instruments (133), when in fact middle- and lower-class men played fiddles at this time, or that “On the eve of the war one out of every fifteen hundred American families had a piano” (139). This latter statement was offered to support the central importance of the piano in domestic life; a truer statistic would be one in five families. Such errors, combined with an unreasonable number of typographical and grammatical errors, blemish Abel’s work.

Chapter 12, “Home, Sweet Home,” stands out as a solid articulation of how well music can reflect the thoughts and feelings of a people. What do soldiers have in common with other men, regardless of which flag they defend? By examining the well-known poignant song “Just Before the Battle, Mother,” Abel demonstrates how the commonly held attitudes of soldiers on both sides resonated with the prevailing Victorian attitudes towards mother. On the other hand, the Confederate and Union versions of “The Drummer Boy of Shiloh” are discussed in order to contrast the typically more gentle southern imagery against the insensitive northern propaganda that found its way into lyrics near the end of the war. Beyond the parlor music, which evoked emotions and domesticity, symbolism was in the public arena too—I found it fascinating that as late as 1903 the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the United Confederate Veterans fought over whether the words to “Dixie should be changed or not.” In answering the current controversy over the Confederate flag, Abel closes chapter 5, “The Star and Bars,” with the well-worded sentence: “When it comes to the flag, the Civil War is not yet over” (97).

Those readers particularly interested in Maryland history will find ample discussion of our state song, “Maryland, My Maryland!”—a bit of poetry that played a disproportionately important role within the Confederacy. It should be pointed out that as recently as March 2001, another move to repeal the Maryland state song was presented to the Maryland legislature.

While John Hill Hewitt and Frederick Nicholls Crouch both stand out as important figures in the history of music in Baltimore, though, the author discusses them only as they influenced Confederate music in general. This is as it should be, for the author does not intend to dwell on music of any particular southern state.

As nicely summarized in the epilogue, songs leave an imperfect trail for the historian as to exactly how significant a role they played in expressing people’s thoughts and feelings. Particularly in the South, and later in the war as resources dwindled, the truth in this matter comes less from publishers’ records (those which

survive) and other quantifiable sources, and more from the wartime letters and diaries and the inferences that can come only out of a multidisciplinary study. To this extent, *Singing the New Nation* is a notable contribution to nineteenth-century American history.

DAVID K. HILDEBRAND  
*The Peabody Conservatory*

*Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government.* By Catherine Allgor. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000. 246 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

In recent decades, scholarship of women in the early nineteenth century has focused on the doctrine of separate spheres, asserting that men and women came to inhabit distinct realms of influence. Men involved themselves in such “public” activities as politics and business, while women devoted their efforts to the home and to imparting virtue within the family as a “Republican Mother.” However, ideas of a strict distinction between “public” and “private” spheres can be problematic, ignoring the interconnectedness of men’s and women’s activities. They further fail to take into account questions of class and race, imposing a unified picture on a diverse society. Catherine Allgor’s *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*, provides a much needed corrective to the usual story of a strict distinction of “public” and “private.” Instead, in this monograph, public and private are inextricably linked in the early decades of the new American capital. Unlike traditional political histories that focus on men’s formal actions, Allgor puts women at the center of the story. She clearly demonstrates the role of elite, white women in shaping the development of American democracy and the political culture of early Washington. Acting within the traditionally “private” sphere, women used social gatherings and personal networks to advance the political careers of their male relatives. They further created unofficial social spaces in which the coalition-building and political maneuvering of republican politics could take place. Drawing on private letters and diaries, Allgor explores many frequently unused and sometimes previously unpublished portions of the personal records of leading Washington women like Margaret Bayard Smith, Dolley Madison, and Louisa Catherine Adams. Through the innovative use of material often discarded by previous historians as unimportant, such as accounts of dinner parties and “drawing-rooms,” visiting, gossip, and “etiquette wars,” she demonstrates the crucial political impact of these seemingly private actions.

Presidents, cabinet officials, and members of Congress faced a unique situation at the dawning of the nineteenth century. Charged with building a new democratic form of government, these men shunned behavior that they viewed as aris-

tocratic or corrupt, seeking to appear un-political and non-partisan. However, Allgor maintains, republican government could not function properly without the creation of networks and the face-to-face interactions needed to reach consensus. The creation of such alliances, then, was taken up in the private sphere, under the guise of "entertainment" and socializing. Beginning with the arrival of Thomas Jefferson in the infant capital and continuing through the dismissal of Andrew Jackson's first cabinet, Allgor portrays the ways in which the business of politics was conducted in the private drawing rooms of Washington City. Elite white women, members of political families, often took the lead, actively wooing potential political allies, advancing candidates for patronage, and materially displaying both status and authority. In doing so, they worked to legitimize the new national government and the new capital in the eyes of the citizenry and of visiting foreign diplomats.

From Thomas Jefferson's small, intimate dinner parties, to Dolley Madison's large formal "drawing rooms," to Louisa Catherine Adams' Tuesday night salons, private gatherings of political families provided members of the executive and legislative branches of government access to one another. By bringing various officeholders together, social events offered the opportunity for advocating policy and creating coalitions. Women, through their ability to establish guest lists, could control access to political figures. Political wives also actively engaged in correspondence, linking their husbands with their constituents back home and campaigning for their re-election. Taking advantage of kinship networks, Washington women used patronage to further their families' interests and to pursue political power. Formal visiting between women took on increasing importance as a way to establish position and control entrance into society. Etiquette wars, in this context, took on significant political significance, as they represented conflict over social and therefore political leadership. In such a setting, the social exclusion of a political wife like Margaret Eaton could bring down a president's cabinet and disrupt the functioning of government. Ironically, women did not generally acknowledge their political involvement or ambitions, nor did they attempt to emulate male standards of behavior, preferring to see their activities as extensions of such womanly duties as "caring for the family and charity towards others" (141). In an interesting reversal of traditional understandings of public and private spheres, women engaged in the "dirty business" of politics, allowing their husbands to remain "pure," virtuous, and seemingly disinterested.

Although she emphasizes the unique position of Washington women and the greater freedom they enjoyed in the developing society of the new capital city, Allgor's work raises larger questions about the division of public and private in the lives of men and women during this period. Did women who were not political wives engage in similar networking efforts (albeit on a smaller scale) on the behalf of their families or their husbands' businesses, for example? While clearly falling

outside the scope of this book, such questions deserve further attention. Allgor's view of public and private as forming a continuum (87) offers an alternative to a strict separation of spheres and provides a new way of viewing the roles of both men and women in the early national period. By demonstrating that gender, as a category of historical analysis, is intimately intertwined with relations of power, Allgor invites further analysis of the ways in which governments depend on the relationship between men and women, and the ways in which even those individuals without the vote can influence the political process.

*Parlor Politics* is engagingly written, deeply thoughtful, and thought-provoking, and makes a significant contribution to both political and women's history in the early national period. By moving women to center stage, Allgor provides her readers with a more complete understanding of the link between politics and society.

MICHELLE LEMASTER  
The Johns Hopkins University

*The Atlantic Sound.* By Caryl Phillips. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. 275 pages. \$25.)

Caryl Phillips' *The Atlantic Sound* opens deceptively. At the onset, it reads like a travelogue documenting the author's present-day banana boat journey from Guadeloupe to England. However, as Phillips scrutinizes interactions between German officers, Burmese crewmen, and passengers, and as he meditates on his parents' feelings as they emigrated from the West Indies to England in 1958, readers discern they hold a sophisticated and subtle work in their hands. Phillips reflects on what it means to be African over time using his own reflections, opinions of those with whom he interacts, historical documents and anecdotes, and poems. Though he ranges widely in time and place, his reflections are anchored in the context of the slave trade and its aftermath.

Phillips organizes the book around three geographic locations that are historically significant for the slave trade: Liverpool, Ghana, and Charleston. In each section, he weaves together his often ironic observations of each locale and historical anecdotes, an episodic story-telling strategy that effectively ties modern life to the history of the slave trade. Throughout the work, Phillips implies that the African diaspora is fragmented and has historically been so. For example, the historical figure of Philip Quaque illustrates past disunity of Africans. Sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the African Quaque was educated in England. He returned to Cape Coast Castle, a British slave entrepôt, as chaplain in 1766. Remarkably, Quaque's letters, dated 1766 to 1811, make no mention of his suffering, enslaved brethren held in dungeons beneath his feet. Phillips sees Quaque's burial plaque during a Ghanaian Panafest ceremony celebrating the unity and strength of Africans despite the "black holo-

caust.” During this “Thru the Door of No Return” ceremony, Phillips watches a Ghanaian man essentially forced to leave with his wife and child because the organizers make it painfully clear whites are not welcome to this African celebration. The Ghanaian is not accepted as a legitimate attendee because he is accompanied by his white wife.

Other stories Phillips shares are equally fascinating and illuminating. He brings to life John Emmanuel Ocansey, a late nineteenth-century African checking on business interests in Liverpool, Judge Watie Waring, the descendant of slave-owning Charlestonians who supported Civil Rights in the mid-twentieth century, and several other figures. He thoughtfully juxtaposes historical characters and events with his own experiences, yielding an often lyrical and always probing exploration of race and place. Phillips navigates a fragmented black diaspora in the late twentieth-century Atlantic Sound, and he implies the roots of this fragmentation are historical.

This very personal work serves as a powerful introduction to the slave trade, issues of race, and how history affects race relations and identity today. However provocative, this work is completely undocumented and it presents a somewhat simplified version of the slave trade and Western trade with Africa. After all, Phillips’s purpose is not to engage in historiographical debates about slavery, but to provoke his readers. His insightful, well-written work succeeds; readers will find themselves thinking about race and the Africans in new ways after reading this contemplative work.

CHRISTINE SEARS  
*University of Delaware*

## Books in Brief

*Johns Hopkins: Knowledge for the World, 1876–2001* pays tribute to the university's ambitious founding as the country's first graduate school modeled after the highly lauded German institutions of higher education. This book celebrates the school's 125th anniversary in a pictorial history edited by Mame Warren, former curator of photographs at the Maryland State Archives and co-author of *Maryland Time Exposures*, *Baltimore: When She Was What She Used To Be, 1850–1930*, and *Bringing Back the Bay*. The author included interviews with dozens of Hopkins alumni.

Johns Hopkins University Press, cloth, \$60

*The 1865 Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers: A Handbook for the Rank and File of the Army* is a reproduction of a guidebook written by August Kautz (1826–96), a captain in the 6th U.S. Cavalry and later brigadier general of volunteers during the Civil War. This is the first published soldier's guide to the duties and rights of each enlisted rank in the army and is now reissued as it appeared at the end of the war. The pocket-sized book contains practical advice on surviving military service grouped in topics such as nutrition, health, punishment, and treatment of prisoners.

Stackpole Books, cloth, \$14.95

Charles Albert Earp and Peter Lowry Johnston have compiled the names of several thousand Civil War soldiers in *These Honored Dead: A Roster of Over 2500 Maryland Union Soldiers Buried in National Cemeteries*. Gathered from the *Rolls of Honor*, twenty-seven volumes published by the Quartermaster General's Office from 1865 to 1871, the authors checked their list for accuracy against the State of Maryland's *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, 1861–1865* (1898). Each entry contains the name of the soldier, rank, burial place, date, cause and place of death.

Willowbend Books, paper, \$25



# Letters to the Editor

*Editor:*

I am writing to comment on the Editor's Notebook, "Name That Tune" in the Spring, 2001 issue.

Today, much of the discipline of history is dominated by the radical left which 'teaches' an agenda-driven social history where facts, data and indeed truth are subservient to politically correct race, gender or class issues. Examples include the history texts, *U.S. History: In the Course of Human Events*, which describes our founding father, George Washington, as a "common man"; and, *World History, Connections to Today*, which gives the fourteenth-century West African 'King' Mansa Musa ninety-three lines of text versus seventeen for Benjamin Franklin. Unfortunately, this radical left teaches an intolerance for any thought other than its own. As a result, our young people know little of traditional American culture, its values or its virtues.

The Civil War was fought, like all other wars, over power and wealth. For the South, slaves represented both because of the three-fifths rule and because of the money invested in them. A different type of labor war could have been fought in the North where manufacturing, trade and commerce were built on the backs of railroad workers and coal miners and young white girls toiling from dawn to dusk (often to early illness or death) on New York railroads and in Pennsylvania coal mines and in New England factories. And in the West, a long war was fought over the federal government policy to "confiscate" lands occupied by Native Americans, offering it free to anyone to encourage settlement. Our forefathers lived by a different set of social standards. We simply cannot judge them by those of today.

Social historians dislike most traditional American history and despise anything Confederate—they refuse to teach it and mock those courageous few who do. To expunge selectively parts of our nation's past leads America to the brink of a very slippery slope indeed: Do we close down the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations because their founders abused labor to the point of driving thousands of young men and women to premature deaths?; Do we tear down the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial because Washington and Jefferson owned slaves?; Do we "repeal" *The Star-Spangled Banner* because it was written by a pro-southern Marylander?; Do we brand Pulitzer Prize winning authors David Donald and James McPherson racists because they lectured at the Museum of the Confederacy?; Do we pass laws to forbid Civil War reenactments because they are now viewed as "politically incorrect"?

Those who truly understand and care about our nation's complex past realize the importance of tolerating different points of view, the importance of balanced

teaching, the importance of unbiased study, and indeed, the importance of seeking the truth. Is it not time for traditional Americans to stand up and take back our history?

*Lawrence M. Denton*

*Queenstown, Maryland*

*Editor:*

In her article "Resisting the Altar: A Case Study of Conversion and Courtship in the Antebellum South" in the spring issue of the magazine, Anya Jabour presents an excellent study of Catherine Wirt but doesn't complete the tale. She states that eighteen-year-old Catharine Wirt penned in her diary in 1829 that she would devote herself to "Self-examination" and to "humble and fervent supplication" before the "God of Mercy." Like most women of the Old South she sought ways "to establish a relationship or effection and candor with a mate who would be acceptable to her parents."

Her first suitor was a Lt. Farley, to whom she became engaged. In June 1831, however, she rejected him and "settled into the life of a confirmed spinster." According to her diary she concentrated on religion and on caring for her family. By August 1833 Alexander Randall, the younger brother of her brother-in-law Thomas, married to Catherine's older sister Laura, proposed to her. By October she had rejected this proposal with her father's approval.

It is interesting to review William Wirt's letter in 1833 to Alexander stating why he was reluctant to have Catherine marry Alexander. He stated that Alexander was a "hopeless prospect where the happiness of a delicate, generous, and confiding female is at stake." He then added, "Is not Annapolis rather a dull theatre for your profession? Is there any such thing as going beyond a naked and stinted subsistence in those courts? It is a decayed and apparently still decaying town where one would not, methinks, choose to associate his profession."

In February 1834 William Wirt died. For the next seven years Catherine lived with her mother in Richmond and Florida, devoting herself to her mother's welfare and her younger sibling's education. In 1841 Alexander served for one session in the U.S. Congress during the presidency of John Tyler. Finally that year Thomas Randall wrote to Alexander from Florida that Catherine had changed and was available. Alexander wrote to Catherine and proposed again. This time she accepted the proposal. They were married in September 1841 and moved to Annapolis. Catherine died in 1853, having given birth to eight children.

Alexander remained a widower until 1856 when he met and married Elizabeth Blanchard, daughter of a close friend, the Reverend John Gowen Blanchard. The couple then had seven children. Between 1861 and 1867 Alexander was attorney general of the state. Elizabeth and Alexander lived in Annapolis with Catherine's

mother, some of Catherine's children, and their own growing family. Alexander Randall died in 1881.

Sincerely,  
*Daniel Randall Beirne*  
*Great Grandson of Alexander*

*Editor:*

I thoroughly enjoyed Anya Jabour's article, "Resisting the Altar: A Case Study of Courtship and Conversion in the Antebellum South," in the spring 2001 issue. At the end of the article, Ms. Jabour writes that Catherine Wirt did eventually marry . . . her old suitor, Alexander Randall . . . [and] bore two children before her death from breast cancer in 1853." According to family history, this is not correct. Alexander Randall and Catherine Wirt married September 22, 1841 and had the following children: William (1842); Catherine (1843); John (1845); Ellen (1846); Fanny (1848); Alexander (1849); Agnes (1850); Richard (1851).

Alexander Randall married Elizabeth Philpot Blanchard in 1856 and they had seven children. I am the great-granddaughter of their first child, Blanchard, and his wife Susan Katharine Brune.

Sincerely,  
*Susan Greenlee White*

# Notices

## Lois Green Carr

During graduation ceremonies at St Mary's College on May 12, Lois Green Carr received an honorary degree in public service for her long career as historian of the St. Mary's City Commission. The college then recognized Dr. Carr for her many contributions to a greater understanding of Maryland's colonial history. As a member of the Maryland Historical Society's Publications Committee, this acclaimed historian has generously shared her time, as well as her knowledge of the colonial Chesapeake world, with us—to our great benefit.

## David Van Tassel Memorial Fund

National History Day, Inc. has started a memorial fund to honor the life of its founder, David Van Tassel. National History Day is a year-long education program that encourages young people to explore a historical subject related to an annual theme. Participating students choose their own topics of study and present museum-type exhibits, multimedia documentaries, original performances, or traditional research papers. This year's entrants numbered more than 700,000. Two thousand finalists met in June at the University of Maryland, College Park for the national competition. Contributions may be sent to: The David Van Tassel Memorial Fund, National History Day, 0119 Cecil Hall, College Park, MD 20742.

## Postcard Project at University of Baltimore

Author and University of Baltimore professor Bert Smith has donated his collection of nearly five hundred postcards to the university. The collection is available to researchers, historians, and preservationists. For information about the "Postcard Project," call Bert Smith (410-837-3268) or archivist Tom Hollowak (410-837-3268). Electronic copies of postcards are available.

## AASLH Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the American Association for State and Local History will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana, September 12–15, 2001. This year's theme is "Our Cultural Heritage: Community Partnerships for the Future." Keynote speaker Charles Osgood, CBS News anchor, will discuss the news media and history. For additional information visit the AASLH web site [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org) or phone 615-320-3203.

# Going into the Backstretch . . .

In the last issue, we announced that the *Maryland Historical Magazine* was out of print and appealed to the membership for old copies that we might create a complete digital or electronic set for perpetuity and use on the Internet. The ink was hardly dry before boxes of journals began appearing at our doorstep. A few days ago we sorted through the lot and nearly accomplished our end—retrieval of a complete set for electronic scanning. Not surprisingly, those that remain to be located are old, rare, and sure to be elusive. Nevertheless we ask your assistance in finding copies of the following issues:

## Volume

- I (1906) Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4
- II (1907) Nos. 1, 3, 4
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- IX (1914) Nos. 1, 2, 3
- X (1915) Nos. 1, 2, 3
- XI (1916) Nos. 3, 4
- XII (1917) Nos. 1, 3, 4
- XIII (1918) Nos. 1, 3
- XIV (1919) No. 2
- XV (1920) Nos. 2, 3, 4
- XVI (1921) Nos. 2, 4



As before, drop us a note if you have (or find) any back issues to donate, or call 410-685-3750 ext. 317. Once again, to those who have donated so far, we extend our deepest gratitude on behalf of generations to come.

*The Editors*

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